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THE BARNBURNERS

THE BARNBURNERS

A Study of the Internal Movements
in the Political History of New
York State and of the Resulting
Changes in Political Affiliation
1830—1852

By

HERBERT D. A. DONOVAN, PH.D.



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THE BARNBURNERS

INTRODUCTION

THE complexity of New York State politics during its whole history has been often a matter of comment. Particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century it was the despair of the most competent observers. William Allen Butler, writing in 1862, declared that it had "always been a vast deep,"¹ and his judgment was echoed by other excellent critics. Horace Greeley, who, by virtue of long experience no less than active personal interest, should certainly have been able to elucidate the subject, complained of "the zigzag, wavering lines and uncouth political designations which puzzled and wearied readers."² The shrewdest politicians from other parts of the union, anxious as they were to conciliate a state which was by its very size a vital factor in the decision of all political questions, were compelled to admit that the currents and counter-currents at work here could not be accurately or reliably gauged. President John Quincy Adams pleaded this lack of comprehension in excuse of some unpopular nominations,³ and Oliver Wolcott wrote: "I don't pretend to comprehend their politics. It is a labyrinth of wheels within wheels, and it is understood only by the managers."⁴

The causes of this complexity were in part general, but in part due to peculiar conditions in the state. The large growth of population, which early made New York the "Empire State," at the same time increased the opportunity of factionists and "cranks" to thrive within her boundaries. New York was the original home of the Mormons, the Anti-Masons, the Spiritualists; and its prominence in the movements for abolition, communism, and other social novelties, was an indication of a vigorous originality that also manifested itself politically.

Another cause was the conflict of local interests due to the industrial differentiation of various sections of the state, which finally

¹ Butler, Wm. A., *Martin Van Buren*, York, preface.
19.

² Quoted in Alexander, DeAlva S., 1827; in *Flagg Mss.*

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³ Letter of Silas Wright, Dec. 20, 1827; in *Flagg Mss.*
⁴ Alexander, *ut supra*, preface.

set the agricultural "up-State" against the commercial metropolis and started that jealousy which, though often slumbering, has never since died out. Perhaps the most striking example of such a cause was the great canal question which for a half-century was easily the weightiest and most agitated political issue in the state. A recent historian of the canals says: "New York State canals have made much history. . . . For many years their monetary struggles dictated the financial policy of the state. They precipitated the calling of at least one convention for constitutional revision, and have occupied a large place in the deliberations of the others. They have occasioned the rise and fall of statesmen, and have often dominated the policies of political parties."⁵ The part of the state most vitally interested in the canals and therefore most eager for their extension was the row of counties along the route of the original Erie Canal; and they could generally rely upon the support of the Hudson River counties and of New York City.⁶ On the other hand, the counties of the southern tier and of the north were usually adverse and often bitterly hostile to the plans of the enthusiastic canal men.

Such differences were often seized upon by shrewd leaders and used with more or less sincerity as levers to lift themselves into office and to promote the views and interests of their friends. Such men as DeWitt Clinton, Martin Van Buren, Thurlow Weed, Millard Fillmore, and William H. Seward owed much of their national prominence to their skill in thus seizing upon the local differences in New York State and molding its public sentiment to their own advancement. The rivalries of Granger and Seward among the Whigs, and of Van Buren and Marcy among the Democrats, took advantage of every local incident and personal peculiarity to tip the scale for or against the rival leaders.

Lastly, the different interpretation of new principles by different individuals and their reaction upon different classes in the state eventually produced in New York, as elsewhere, a breaking up of the traditional party groups which in turn led to new alignments and combinations that at first seemed difficult to understand. The

⁵ Whitford, Noble E., *History of the Canal System of New York*, introduction. opposed. See *ibid.*, 82, 84.

⁶ But the city at first was strongly

steady development of the political power of the Abolitionists is perhaps the most notable instance of this.

Between 1840 and 1850, there occurred an internal conflict in the Democratic party of New York, so serious that it rent the party in twain and drove it from the place of power it had held for so many years. This schism eventually resulted in the permanent alienation from the party of many of its best and most competent men, and contributed very materially to the realignment of parties that has since prevailed. The schism has commonly been known as the "Barnburner movement," and has been treated as being mainly an adjunct to the plans and policies of certain party leaders of that day. It was the most bitter and prolonged of the many stirring contests that enlivened the politics of New York State during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, a period when, perhaps more than at any time before or since, the energies of the average American were engaged in politics; and the results that I have indicated could hardly have followed from causes so trivial as those often alleged.

In the following essay, I have undertaken to examine this subject with a view to determining if possible, first, to what degree the contest was one of principle and to what degree one of personality; and, secondly, whether its political results were a leading or only a subsidiary factor in the great changes that soon followed; in short, whether the rise and fall of the "Barnburners" deserve to be accorded a higher importance than they have hitherto been granted in American political history.

The material for my work has been obtained largely from sources not hitherto used in this connection, although similar subjects in the same general field of politics, or individual actors in the movement, have been investigated.

I have visited many places where the Barnburners exerted their greatest influence and have thus obtained, I believe, an appreciation of the atmosphere of their times, so different from our own. In the libraries, historical societies, and older newspaper offices of Buffalo, Batavia, Rochester, Albion, Canandaigua, Utica, Herkimer, Clinton, Rome, and Watertown, I have searched with considerable success for material to supplement that used by those who have previously given us brief accounts of the Barnburners.

The data thus obtained have been compared with and added to those available in the libraries of Washington, New York, and Albany, which I had already used. In the homes and from the families of several of the leaders, such as Dean Richmond, Addison Gardiner, Sanford E. Church, and Albert H. Tracy, I have also sought assistance in the form of access to manuscripts, etc.; but, while I was received in all cases with courtesy, I found little new material from those sources. I also found that the files of newspapers published in the smaller towns are woefully deficient and in imminent danger of becoming steadily more so, which necessarily cuts off an important, if not wholly reliable, source of information.

I desire especially to acknowledge helpful assistance and encouragement obtained from Mr. Victor H. Paltsits of the New York Public Library; Mr. Frank H. Severance of the Buffalo Historical Society, and his courteous librarian, Mrs. Andrews; Mr. E. P. Foreman, president, and Mr. E. D. Putnam, curator, of the Rochester Historical Society; Miss Mildred Long, assistant librarian of the Oneida Historical Society, Utica; former Judge C. D. Adams of Utica, of whose unique aid I have spoken elsewhere; Mr. Romeyn Smith of Watertown; and Mr. Adams of the State Law Library, Albany. I am indebted in an especial degree to Professor Arthur H. Nason, director of the New York University Press, whose careful and scholarly oversight of the form and style of the whole monograph has led to numerous improvements in those particulars. To all others who have assisted in any way in the preparation of the work I extend thanks.

CHAPTER I

STATE OF POLITICAL PARTIES DURING THE PERIOD OF THE BARNBURNERS

THE opening of the fourth decade of the nineteenth century found the Democracy of New York united, intrenched in power, and seemingly invincible. All the offices of the state were in its hands; and its erstwhile opponents had lost not only power, but almost respectability. The banner of the victorious Jacksonians floated over every citadel of political importance; and, under the rising demand for popular rights, every remnant of aristocratic influence seemed likely to disappear.

The active management of the successful party was held in the capable hands of that extraordinary group of seasoned politicians known to posterity, as well as to their contemporaries, as the Albany Regency. This body, formed originally during the post-bellum period when everyone was professing allegiance to the party of Monroe, had consisted at first of William L. Marcy, Samuel A. Talcott, Benjamin F. Butler, Martin Van Buren, Azariah C. Flagg, Edwin Croswell, Silas Wright, and some others. They were all men of keen intellect, political imagination, shrewd practical sense, and untiring energy; men, too, of undoubted integrity, honest in public as well as in private life. They did not, however, disdain the work of practical politics; as a high-minded apologist says, "They had sense enough to know that, when they were in power, they could be served better in places of trust by their friends than by their enemies . . . and they acted accordingly."¹ They were among the first to practice and perfect many of the political devices that became the commonplaces of the next generation. The legislative caucus—not for nominating, but for binding a too lax majority—the official newspaper as an expounder of doctrine they wished to be believed, and, as above stated, the unconcealed use of patronage as a mighty argument for regu-

¹ Butler, *Martin Van Buren*, 28-29.

larity, were peculiarly their work. Yet, in a broader sense, they conceived their dominant position as affording them a unique opportunity to serve the state through mastery.

But with the very attainment of their objects began their decline. As soon as they were able to place their members in national posts, it was inevitable that the men thus honored should be less tightly bound by the interests that had made them great. A United States senator, in those days of laggard communication, soon got out of touch with many of the districts and men that, as a state official, he would have had to see or hear from frequently. The very advance of time, too, cooled the ardor and impeded the activity of those who in their youth had been the leaders in the fray. Some attained judgeships, and felt perhaps unconsciously the restraint imposed by such dignities. Younger men, ambitious in their turn, chafed at the domination of the older leaders, believing it to be the result of selfishness. The dispensing of patronage produced its usual result of alienating the disappointed office-seekers, whose number was constantly increasing. Moreover, according to a friendly critic who discussed the subject some years later, "long and arbitrary use of power had driven into the ranks of the opposition any neutral body that might have replaced seceders."² For all these perfectly natural reasons, the mighty Regency began to dwindle in men's estimation, and to be, first, less feared, and then less respected.

The opposition party was the Whig. This party, which grew out of the loose assemblage of the anti-Jackson men in 1828, gradually gained strength by drawing to itself all the disaffected elements opposed to Jacksonian principles and practices, and by developing a philosophy and a set of principles that appealed to considerable fractions of the people other than disappointed office-seekers.

By their name and the circumstances of their first rallying, the Whigs loudly proclaimed themselves the opponents of autocracy in government, and champions of the prerogatives of the legislature against the domination of ambitious executives. In the state of New York, lacking an overshadowing personality such as Jack-

² See *Democratic Review*, XXV, 487; probably by the editor, Thomas Prentice Kettell.

son's to attack, they fulminated against the power of the Regency, which, they averred, was but a hydra-headed monster moved, nevertheless, by a single will, and none the less odious because seemingly divided.

The more Jackson showed himself to be hostile to their pet projects, one after the other, the more boldly the Whigs espoused them. They took their stand upon the American system of Henry Clay—a national bank, protective tariff, internal improvements at federal expense, and the broader exercise by Congress of whatever powers it deemed necessary to the general welfare.

This last attitude in particular inspired their opponents to charge that the Whigs were but the old-time Federalists masquerading under another name to avoid the obloquy that would else be theirs; for Federalism, never very strong in New York, had finally become most unpopular. So, during the whole of the Jacksonian epoch, the Administration papers persistently dubbed their opponents "old Federals," and spoke of "Federal meetings," and "Federal sheets"; while the Whigs as stubbornly resisted the charge and advertised meetings of "Young Whig Republicans."

The death of De Witt Clinton left a vacancy in the gubernatorial office, which was temporarily filled by the lieutenant-governor, Nathaniel Pitcher. At the next election, he was displaced by the Regency in favor of Enos T. Throop, who had won some favor with the Anti-Masons. Throop, in turn, not appealing to the astute politicians at Albany as a source of strength to their plans, was made to give way to William L. Marcy. Marcy was a sunny, broad-minded, practical man, the elasticity of whose principles in political exigencies was often demonstrated. His "hunkering" after the rewards of office had already been coined into a memorable phrase—"To the victor belong the spoils of the enemy"—and was destined again to give a picturesque if not wholly accurate name to his associates—the "Hunkers."

During Marcy's lengthy incumbency of the office of governor, the strength of the "National Republicans" steadily grew in the state; for, with the tactical advantage of a minority, they seized upon every mistake and misfortune of their opponents, and used national as well as state issues to serve their ends. This was a period of unbridled speculation in Western lands, which was en-

couraged and played upon by many of the state banks to such an extent that the federal government felt obliged to restrict the credit facilities of those small institutions. When the measures thus taken were followed by widespread distress, the Whigs received a golden opportunity to capitalize discontent into votes. They pointed out that the Jacksonians were entirely responsible for the obnoxious measures; and they speedily drew to themselves most of the friends of the small banks, and others who had suffered from the sudden stoppage of the Western land development. These people came to be called "Conservatives."

With this accession of strength, the Whigs gained an overwhelming victory in the legislative elections of 1837, a victory that, like the Panic, seems to have been all the more overwhelming because unforeseen. Flagg, who had barely scented some evidences of the impending crash,³ wrote to Van Buren on November 5th: "We have been beaten in all directions, much after the manner of 1824. There have been in most of the counties dissensions among our friends in regard to banks, currency, etc., which have enabled the Whigs to walk over the course. . . ." ⁴ He and his allies felt that the overthrow partook even somewhat of the nature of a disgrace. It soon became evident that the consequences of the national crisis were so serious that it would be difficult for any of those connected with the party to justify themselves to their constituents; and accordingly the campaign of 1838 resulted in a rout. The victorious Whigs placed the brilliant Seward in the governor's seat for which he had long striven, and gave him a friendly Assembly to assist him. To this, the next year, they added the Senate, by capturing the Albany district. The year following, they were able to hold their vantage, but by only a small margin, even with the aid of a sensational national campaign. Seward's majority of ten thousand in 1838 was cut in half, and the Whig majority in the Assembly dropped to four.

This demonstrated, if any demonstration were needed, that New York was a Democratic state. It required all the ingenuity of some extraordinary leaders to maintain the Whigs on something like even terms. Foremost among these leaders was that arche-

³ Letter to Van Buren, from Albany, Nov. 5, 1837; *Van Buren Mss.*, XXX.

⁴ *Ibid.*

type of a party boss, the hard-hitting yet subtle and persuasive editor, Thurlow Weed, personal friend but political rival of the redoubtable Croswell. Beside him stood the less worldly yet more eloquent Greeley, whose pen was just beginning its magic sway over the American public. Before these two in the public battle, though less potent than Weed in the party councils, were the magnetic Seward and the courtly Francis Granger. Around them clustered a large number of clever politicians, one of whom was to lead his party to victory a few years later by the policy of "divide and conquer," and to become himself the governor, John Young.

Such was the situation of the Whigs; but for a time the Democrats believed their most redoubtable rivals to be, not the Whigs, but the new passion-born party of the Anti-Masons. The Democratic organs of the early thirties breathe scarcely a fear of the Whigs, while they are replete with sarcastic gibes, bitter accusations, and fearful prophecies, concerning these new masters of the western half of the state. The eighth senatorial district, embracing the country west of the Finger Lakes, became widely known as the "infected district," because of the anti-Masonic contagion therein; and it was not until after 1834 that the sway of the Anti-Masons there was really broken. The mediocrity of most of their leaders, the satisfying of their demands to some extent,⁵ but, above all, the emergence of greater issues, finally disrupted their party; and thereupon the great bulk of its membership followed Weed, its best organizer, into the Whig ranks.

Another element, which for a few years attracted considerable attention and reduced the ordinary Democratic strength in the state, was the Equal Rights Party, whose members were commonly called, from a well-known incident that occurred during their formation, the Loco-focos. This party was practically confined to New York City, and its activities extended over a comparatively short period. It made its fight against the granting of any monopoly, especially of a banking nature; and, during the term of its existence, it fought vigorously the domination of Tammany Hall in city politics. The Loco-focos were extremists of the

⁵ Hammond, Jabez D., *Political History of New York*, II, 440.

Democracy; hence, they received no sympathy from the Whigs, whose only interest in them lay in the possibility of their weakening the regular Democracy sufficiently to place it in the minority. Indeed, the aversion felt for the rebels is reflected in the persistent attempts made by the Whigs to stigmatize the entire Democracy with Loco-focoism, hoping thus to render it obnoxious to moderate men. For some years, the Whig journals harped upon the Loco-foco spirit of the Democrats, and condemned every reforming measure proposed as savoring of Loco-foco heresy and revealing the danger of entrusting valuable rights and property to the control of such fanatics. That this method of attack was sufficiently effective to become a sore point with the Democrats, may be judged from the admission of the *Democratic Review* that, in one campaign, "a use was made of the unfortunate word 'Loco-foco' . . . alone sufficient to frighten fifty thousand very worthy and honest people from the ballot boxes."⁶ Finally, the term was inaccurately applied to the very subjects of our study, as is indicated by the reference of a Whig memoirist to "that portion of the Democratic party in this State which was known as Loco-focos or Barnburners,"⁷ thus attempting to stigmatize their radicalism.

As short-lived as the Loco-focos, but much more powerful, were the Anti-Renters. The Anti-Rent party, as is well known, grew out of the discontent roused by the survival of old manorial rights in the "patroonships" along the Hudson. A concise account of the activities of the rebellious tenants, which finally led to their being placed in the position of outlaws and to their resorting to political action for relief, was contained in Governor Wright's message to the legislature of 1845. The Anti-Renters controlled the votes of about ten counties, being strongest in Schoharie, Delaware, and Columbia, and had the balance of power for two years.

At intervals, but principally in 1834 and 1844, came outbreaks of that semi-social, semi-political proscribing feeling that in those years gave unusual power to the "Native American" party. This coterie confined itself chiefly to New York City, and there it succeeded in electing, in the spring of 1844, its city ticket as against both Democrats and Whigs. Its support, however, was

⁶ *Democratic Review*, I, Jan., 1838. *Buffalo Historical Society*, IV.

⁷ John Hubbell, in *Publications of the*

mostly emotional; and its followers, like the others of these minor organizations, presently fell back into the ranks that they had left to join it.

Last, but in the light of later events far from least, of the confusing elements of that confusing period, was the small but growing faction of the Anti-slavery men. Confined at first to the radical Abolitionists, these innovators gradually and almost unobserved gained strength from year to year, as some new event would focus the attention of the country upon what was deemed the ever-widening ambition and arrogance of the Southern leaders. The struggle over the right of petition found reflection in New York State political circles; and New York congressmen followed John Quincy Adams in the campaign he made to assert the right of all people to discuss "the peculiar institution." Abolition societies sprung up; the circulation of *The Liberator* increased; and, as a natural consequence, the number of those who sought to promote abolition by political action grew larger and larger. Scattered through the evenly-balanced townships of central New York, such men made their presence known to experienced political wiseacres by voting, whenever an occasion presented itself, for whichever candidate seemed most favorable to the restriction of slavery.

CHAPTER II

POLITICAL ISSUES CONNECTED WITH THE NEW YORK CANALS

INTO the medley of parties described in the previous chapter, there were introduced during the fourth decade new and fruitful causes of discord which were destined within a brief time to bear fruit in the revolt of the Barnburners.

As has been intimated above, the most vital and delicate question in state politics at that time, the one affecting the most people through their financial interest or their state pride, was the question, What shall be done with the canals? With the triumph of De Witt Clinton and the opening of the great work started by him, it became settled not only that New York was to have a canal system, but that it was to rely upon that system as the bulwark of its agricultural development, its commercial prospects, and even its financial resources. Van Buren had "seen the light" as early as 1818;¹ and, in 1825, had composed his long feud with Clinton and thus made himself safe. Into every phase of the people's life, the influence of the canals penetrated. Cities and villages started or thrived by virtue of the canal trade, even to such an extent that it was seriously debated whether it would not be well to limit them. Population shifted to meet the demands of the new commerce. The work of completing the canals furnished employment to multitudes of men whose interests were identical with those of the contractors in seeing their employment continued. The supervision of the canals required a considerable force of public employes directed by a powerful Canal Commission, which, with its servants, constituted a weighty element in state politics.

Above all these considerations, yet governed by them, was the question of the proper policy of the state in financing the construction of the canals and in expending the money derived from

¹ Whitford, 82.

them in tolls. At a very early period, it became evident that the income from this source would exceed even the sanguine predictions of the most ardent Clintonians; and in 1827 the legislature suspended entirely the imposition of a direct tax, and, for the succeeding fifteen years, the ordinary and extraordinary expenses of the state were paid out of the surplus revenues of the canal fund.² As Whitford remarks, "The people had begun to think that taxes need never again be imposed, for the waterways were looked upon as a veritable treasure-house for supplying funds."³ The financial authorities of the state, the men who observed most directly the effects of the no-tax policy, did not share this view. They saw the general fund, which consisted of "bonds and mortgages for lands sold, and for loans to individuals and others,"⁴ dwindle from \$4,396,932.97 in 1814, when there had been a tax of two mills on the dollar of valuation of real and personal property, to \$190,596.62 in 1834, when there was no tax at all. William L. Marcy was comptroller when the no-tax policy was adopted in 1827, and he opposed it then. Later, when he became governor, he reiterated from year to year the dangers of that policy, but his warnings fell on deaf ears.

In 1835, the situation seemed to have reached a climax. The Governor explained that the state was then facing either a loan, which was objectionable, or a direct tax for general expenses. It remained, however, for the clear-sighted and high-principled comptroller of that year, Azariah C. Flagg, to put into concrete and inescapable form the necessities of the case. It was he who at this time outlined and urged the financial policy which, in its application later, became the bone of contention not only between the Democrats and Whigs, but between two almost equally-balanced sections of the Democrats themselves.

The Comptroller said:

The annual reports from this office for the last nine years have urged upon the consideration of the representatives of the people the necessity of a state tax, to enable the treasury to meet the ordinary expenses of the government, and to save the general fund from annihilation. The

² *Governor's Message, 1833*; quoted in Whitford, I, 137-138.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 140.

⁴ *Comptroller's Report, 1835*, in *N. Y. Assembly Documents for 1835*, No. 5.

acts of the legislature, instead of favoring the policy of preserving the principal of the general fund, have indicated a settled determination to use it up for the current expenses of the treasury, and not to levy a tax, so long as there remained a remnant of that fund. . . . The alternative is now presented, whether a light tax shall be levied, or a state debt created, for supplying the treasury with the means of paying the daily demands upon it. A decision of the question cannot be postponed any longer. It is necessary for the preservation of a sound financial system, that a tax should be levied, of at least one mill upon the dollar of the valuation of real and personal estate. If the treasury is not relieved by a tax, there will be a debt against the treasury of at least \$1,500,000 by the close of 1837. In addition to this, there will be a debt on account of the lateral canals of at least \$3,000,000. . . . In authorizing money to be borrowed and stock to be issued for the construction of the lateral canals, the salutary principle adopted (in 1817) has not been adhered to. . . . It is a wise rule . . . never to borrow a dollar without laying a tax in the same instant for paying the interest annually, and the principal within a given term, and to consider that tax as pledged to the creditors on the public faith.⁵

In this last sentence, the sentiment of which he attributed to Thomas Jefferson, Flagg struck the keynote which he and his followers ever afterward unflinchingly maintained.

During the same period, and in a closely related field, that of canal extension, a policy was also marked out that could not be acceptable to all. The marvellous success of the Erie and Champlain Canals roused a spirit of emulation, even of envy, throughout the state. From every section requests poured in upon the legislature to authorize the building of canals, upon the public credit. We hear of an assemblyman being chosen in St. Lawrence county, on the promise that he would work to get a canal built connecting the St. Lawrence River with Lake Champlain, over the Adirondack divide! This gentleman's public career was brief, owing to the perversity of geography. In a single year, no fewer than seventy-three routes for canals within the state were suggested, and seventeen were authorized to be surveyed. One of the most talked-of routes was the "Genesee Valley" route, which was to connect the Erie Canal with the headwaters of the Alleghany River. When a numerously-signed petition, known as the Evans petition, reached

⁵ *Comptroller's Report, 1835, in N. Y. Assembly Documents for 1835, No. 5.*

the legislature of 1827, praying for the authorization of that route, the Senate referred the petition to a committee, of which Silas Wright was chairman; and this committee made an exhaustive report.⁶ Mr. Wright laid down three tests as conditions to be fulfilled before the state should lend its sanction to any new canal: "First, the practicability of making a canal upon the route proposed, and of obtaining a supply of water sufficient for its use. Second, the ability of the state to sustain the expense, or the resources from which the work is to be carried on. Third, the importance of the work, and the promise of its utility, and consequent income, to reimburse the treasury for the expense of making it." "These principles," says Hammond, "were then novel, and were repudiated by a large and intelligent portion of the community,"⁷ presumably that portion directly interested in some of the multifarious canal schemes. Nevertheless, the Chenango Canal bill, authorizing a project similar to that of the Evans petition, was rejected by the Senate, 14 to 10, after Francis Granger had forced it through the Assembly. From this report of Wright's, and from its consequences, undoubtedly started some of the opposition to him which was usually kept concealed and which never had an apt opportunity to display itself until nearly twenty years afterward.

Here, then, we see outlined the two principal issues arising out of the canal situation as it then existed, one having reference to the application of the money, the other to the extension of the canal system. The latter attracted the greater degree of popular attention. In 1825, work was begun on the Oswego Canal and also on the Cayuga and Seneca Canal. In 1830, the Chemung, in 1831, the Crooked Lake, and in 1833, the Chenango, were started.⁸ These local projects gratified the pride and doubtless contributed to the convenience and helped the trade of their immediate neighborhoods; but, from the standpoint of the state, they were costly experiments as well as glaring manifestations of the inexperience and poor judgment of their promoters and officials. Thus, the committee of the legislature which reported the law for the construction of the Chemung Canal estimated the annual

⁶ *N. Y. Senate Journal*, 1827, 170.

⁷ Hammond, III, 89-90.

⁸ Hepburn, A. Barton, *Artificial Waterways*, 57.

tolls at \$18,288.44; the Canal Commissioners thought that they might be \$5,599.00; in 1834, they were actually \$3,079.69.⁹ "The Oswego canal . . . has, notwithstanding its peculiar advantages and a small auxiliary revenue from land sales, been a constant drain upon the treasury, averaging about \$14,000, for each of the five years it has been in operation."¹⁰ And similar illustrations might be cited of every one of these "lateral canals."

While the western section of the state was clamoring for more canals, a strong demand was growing up for a ship canal connecting Lake Ontario with the Hudson River. It was said¹¹ that the enlargement of the Erie Canal would only keep pace with the increase of business and would not accommodate new business. The Common Council of New York City and the Utica Chamber of Commerce supported the new plan. The agitation became so strong that the legislature referred the whole question to the Canal Board for its decision. The Board replied that, in its opinion, the ship canal scheme was not feasible, but, yielding to the sentiment of the eighth senatorial district, recommended enlargement of the Erie. The cry had been for a canal "sixty by six," that is, having a surface width of sixty feet and a depth of six feet. The Surveyor-General, after some incomplete calculations, had estimated the cost of this at \$12,516,000. The Board yielded to the outcry for enlargement by recommending dimensions of seventy feet by seven, a change of basis which upset even the hasty figures of the Surveyor-General, and left the probable outlay very uncertain. This unexpected change was one cause of the recriminations later bandied back and forth between the parties as to the extravagance of the work.

The next year, 1837, in reply to a request from the legislature, the Canal Board said that it would be for the interest of the state to hasten the enlargement of the Erie; but the Board would not approve of new loans, and would not estimate the cost. Nothing therefore was done. The state debt due to canals in 1837 was only about \$200,000 more than it had been twelve years before, when the Erie and Champlain Canals had been completed, although in the meantime 165 miles of lateral canals had been built.¹²

⁹ *Comptroller's Report, 1835, 23.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹¹ Davis, Speech in the Assembly, Feb. 9-11, 1843.

¹² *Ibid.*

Meanwhile, on May 6, 1836, the legislature passed an act providing for the Genesee Valley Canal. In June, 1837, the first Genesee Valley contracts were let; and 52 miles of this canal were finished before measures were taken that stopped all canal work, as we shall see later.¹³ The Black River Canal also was authorized by the legislature of 1836. This concluded the series of positive measures for canal construction, during Democratic ascendancy.

Some of these measures were undoubtedly thought to be speculative; but the enlargement of the Erie Canal was not so considered. Whitford says: "The improvement of the canal was generally conceded to be a necessity, but opinions widely differed concerning the proper policy to pursue."¹⁴ Governor Marcy had written in his message of 1834: "If our canals are to be what a wise management cannot fail to make them—the principal channels for this [western] trade—we must calculate its extent, and make them adequate to its object."¹⁵ The Whigs later asserted that such utterances as this of Marcy, and the canal laws to which he referred proved the Democrats' responsibility for the "wild and reckless expenditure" that ensued. They—the Whigs—"had done nothing but execute the mad projects which were on foot when they came into power."¹⁶ But both Marcy and the Canal Board had specifically deprecated "such an expenditure of money upon this work as will interfere with the arrangements now in progress for accumulating a sum sufficient to pay the Erie and Champlain canal debt,"¹⁷ and had urged a sound method of financing the improvement.

Thus, it will be seen, the steadily rising tide of enthusiasm for internal improvements afforded ample ground for serious differences of opinion as to the ways and means of executing such works. The increasing cost of maintaining the state government made it difficult to preserve the balance between economy and progress. Conflicting impulses on the subject of expenditures for canals resulted, impulses that grew stronger each year of Governor Marcy's incumbency. Eventually they began to open a rift in the hitherto solid lines of the majority party. Those who believed in a rather

¹³ Whitford, 712.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁶ Davis, *ut supra*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

liberal policy of pledging the state's credit and resources to the extension and completion of the canal system at an early date began to be called "Conservatives." Those, on the other hand, who favored the new policy of limiting the canal expenditures to the amount available from the surplus revenue of those canals, received the designation "Radicals." It is by these names that the two groups are always referred to in the early days of their strife.

The first leaders of the Conservatives included Henry A. Foster, Samuel Beardsley, Edwin Croswell, and William C. Bouck. Foster and Beardsley were veteran members of the legislature,¹⁸ residents of canal counties, and presumably much influenced by the local sentiment of their home districts, which had experienced to the full the benefits of the public works. Croswell we have already seen as the brainy and resourceful editor of the *Argus*, which was the recognized organ of the Democracy. Bouck, originally a farmer politician from rock-ribbed Schoharie County, had for some years been a prominent and industrious Canal Commissioner. His journeys, in the execution of his duties, up and down the route of the great work, mounted on his faithful old white horse whose name was often coupled with his own, had made him well known and well liked by a numerous public.

The Radical element naturally found its protagonist in the stern, able, but almost too strict Comptroller, who had outlined the policy of retrenchment that was making the issue a live one. It has been truly said that the personality of Flagg endowed the reform movement with more vitality and cohesion than any other single thing could have done.¹⁹ Many of his political associates, accustomed to accept his judgment on practical, and especially on financial matters, soon adhered to his course in regard to the retrenchment policy, and thus variously affected both their own later fortunes and those of the party. Foremost among these was Silas Wright, who, as a United States senator, was then upholding with distinction the credit of the Empire State in that tribunal where the genius of Webster, Clay, Calhoun, and Benton made it doubly difficult for other men to shine. Wright's enforced long absences from the state, and the fact that, when at home,

¹⁸ Alexander, II, 6, 53.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 58.

he lived in the remote north-country village of Canton, prevented him from having close personal knowledge of, or interest in, the canal problem. He was a close friend and steady correspondent of Flagg, and very soon became convinced of the "sinister designs" of the canal advocates and the danger of agreeing with them. Michael Hoffman, of Herkimer, a distinguished lawyer and a former Member of Congress, and his "brother," Judge Arphaxed Loomis, reached the same conclusion by an independent study of the finances. John Van Buren, son of the President, and Benjamin F. Butler, former Attorney-General in Jackson's cabinet and a leader of the American bar, attached themselves to the same cause.

Such was the political and financial situation in the state when, on January 1, 1838, the Assembly for the first time passed into the hands of the Whigs by virtue of their astonishing and overwhelming victory of the previous November. On the main point at issue, the Whigs were enthusiastic advocates of more liberal expenditures for canals, both new and old. Their chairman of the canal committee in the new Assembly, Samuel B. Ruggles, promptly brought in a report of such weight and timeliness that it is ranked with the earlier reports of Wright and Flagg and the later ones of Denniston and Seymour as a classic on this vexatious question.²⁰ In this famous report, Ruggles took a most optimistic view of the possibilities of the canals as commerce-carrying and revenue-producing agencies. He declared that, far from there being any serious doubt about their ability to repay the expenditures then contemplated, there was good reason to believe that, should the sum of \$20,000,000 be borrowed by the state for their extension, it could be repaid out of the revenues of the canals themselves within twenty years; and, should \$40,000,000 be borrowed, it would be repaid, from the same source, within twenty-eight years.

The Whig Assembly thereupon proceeded to pass a bill authorizing the Canal Commissioners to borrow \$1,000,000 for the purpose of the enlargement, and pledging the credit of the state to see that the work should be completed within five years, and making a conditional appropriation of \$3,000,000 in addition to the \$1,000,000. In the Senate, the bill was amended so as to

²⁰ Hammond, III, 90, 92.

authorize an absolute loan of \$4,000,000; and, in this form, it passed both houses almost unanimously, only Preston King and two other Radicals voting against it in the lower house.²¹ When the measure came to Marcy, he did not veto it, as one might have expected. His views of canal construction were already moderating; for in his message of that year, a message destined to be his last, the Governor had said, "I am persuaded that a larger sum might be advantageously expended, without causing interruption or delays . . . on the canal. . . . Both duty and interest indicate the propriety of making it [the canal] not only adequate to the public wants, but of making it so at the earliest practicable period."²² From this time on, Marcy grew to be less and less identified with the Radical wing of his party.

Governor Seward, in his first message, declared that the finances of the state were in a satisfactory condition, using language of praise that was to return later and vex him and his party. He contradicted the views of Flagg, saying optimistically: "Taxation for purposes of internal improvement is happily unnecessary as it would be unequal and oppressive. . . . the most ardent advocates of the [canal] system failed altogether to conceive the vast tribute which it has caused already to flow into the treasury. . . . their [i. e., the canals'] productiveness would warrant the state in expending in internal improvements \$4,000,000 annually during a period of ten years. . . . the revenues of the canals alone²³ would reimburse this expenditure previous to 1865."²⁴ The legislature, now Whig in both branches, accepted this view with enthusiasm; and the process of building and borrowing went vigorously on. The state debt rose by leaps and bounds—\$16,229,141.68 increase²⁵ in four years of Whig-Conservative policy, or about 225 per cent. Coincidentally with this, the credit of the state fell with alarming rapidity. Her five per cent bonds were almost unsaleable at 70 cents on the dollar, six per cents sold at 75 to 78, and even seven per cents were down to 90.²⁶ The difficulty of obtaining money practically put a stop to the public works. This was during a time of general depression, when the country had not recovered

²¹ Hammond, II, 484.

²² Davis, 21-22.

²³ Seward also urged three lines of state-aided railroads.

²⁴ Quoted in Whitford, I, 158.

²⁵ Hammond, III, 275.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 285.

from the effects of the great panic, and when many states suspended entirely the redemption of their obligations.

In the face of this serious predicament, a general demand went up for retrenchment and a return to the economical system previously in use, of "pay as you go." The legislature was bitterly censured for lending its sanction to the accumulation of the new debt; and the demand for a check upon its power in that direction found expression in a notable set of resolutions introduced in the Assembly of 1841 by Judge Arphaxed Loomis, of Herkimer County, and afterwards known as the "People's Resolutions." Whether Judge Loomis should really receive the credit for the origin of the sentiments therein expressed has been a subject of warm dispute. George W. Smith, a close student of that period, upholds his claim unquestioningly.²⁷ Nathaniel S. Benton, Loomis' contemporary, on the other hand, testifies: "This proposition was adopted by a convention held in the county (Herkimer) in the year 1837. . . . The rough draft of the resolution was shown to me in my office by my then law partner, in his own handwriting, and I am confident that he alone was the author of it. . . . When first brought out, the project attracted but little attention outside of the county; but it became one of the standing resolutions of the county conventions for several years, and was finally adopted as a cardinal point in the democratic creed, first in the county, and then in the State."²⁸ Henry O'Reilly, of Rochester, on the other hand, always contended that he himself was largely responsible for the idea, and that, "had the name of Herkimer never been heard," constitutional reform in the direction of retrenchment—which we shall see was an essential element of the People's Resolutions—would have come about as early.²⁹ The Resolutions provided that the State Constitution should be so amended that every proposition to increase the state debt must be submitted to the people separately and specifically and approved by them before the money could be borrowed. This novel and radical proposal was keenly discussed, and failed of passage in the Assembly by a tie vote, 53 to 53,³⁰ many Democrats voting against it. The

²⁷ *George W. Smith Mss.*

²⁸ Benton, N. S., *Herkimer County and the Upper Mohawk Valley*, 279.

²⁹ *O'Reilly Mss.*

³⁰ Lincoln, Charles Z., *Constitutional History of New York*, II, 83. Hammond (III, 289) says, by 35 to 49.

course of events, however, steadily increased the public sentiment in its favor; and when, in the next year, the Democrats gained control of the Assembly, Judge Loomis' friend and neighbor, Michael Hoffman, chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means, utilized this sentiment to effect a drastic change in the canal and financial policy of the state. This was done through the celebrated act known commonly as the "Stop and Tax law" of 1842.

This act, which forms chapter 114 of the laws of 1842, provided that all canal work should forthwith be stopped, except such parts as were actually indispensable to navigation or subject to decay by inoperation or more costly when idle. It further provided that a one mill tax should be levied, thus restoring the policy abandoned fifteen years before and so vigorously but vainly insisted upon by Flagg in his report of 1835. The entire proceeds of the first year's tax, and one half of the amount thereafter, were for the rehabilitation of the general fund, and to be used for general state purposes. The other half was devoted to canal purposes.⁸¹ It will readily be seen that the principle and prescriptions of the law were alike radical and reformatory, and that it must have represented a large body of popular sentiment, to succeed in adoption.

Nevertheless, even within the Democratic ranks, there were many, and among them men of influence, who opposed such a departure, and many others who consented to it only on the ground of temporary necessity. Among the former was Henry A. Foster, and among the latter, William C. Bouck. Foster proposed in the Senate an amendment to Hoffman's bill, appropriating \$650,000 for the specific purpose of continuing work upon the Erie enlargement, and the Black River and Genesee Valley Canals. This amendment failed; whereupon another Democrat, Senator Faulkner, moved an amendment relating to the Canal Board, having a similar purpose to Foster's. This also failed; but Hammond declares that "the proceedings of the Democratic members of the Senate on the amendments of Mr. Foster and Mr. Faulkner are worthy of particular notice, because they afforded the first public demonstration in our *state legislature* of the difference of opinion be-

⁸¹ Lincoln, II, 84.

tween that portion of the Democratic party called the Barnburners or radicals, and those that were afterwards called conservatives, or 'Hunkers.'"³² From this time forward, the Radicals had a concrete platform on which they could stand together and seek to dominate the will of the party.

The salutary effects of the Stop and Tax Law were almost instantaneous, and were admitted even by its foes, who, however, sought to divide the credit. With the cessation of work upon the canals, state expenditures dropped considerably. This, joined with the helpful accession of new income and the assurance of more, enabled the state, for the first time in several years, to live within its resources. As soon as this became apparent, the credit of the state improved, the seven per cent bonds returning to par in two months, the others during the next year. Among the eminent financiers who approved the report on which the law was based appears the name of Albert Gallatin, certainly no mean judge.³³ And three years later, we find Governor Wright, in his very able message, declaring: "The manner in which that legislation was received by the people, although imposing a direct tax on all their personal property as its first provision, the salutary influences it so promptly exerted upon public and private credit, and the triumphant manner in which its provisions and policies have been sustained by the people . . . present a more forcible argument . . . than it would be in my power to offer."³⁴

Thus it may be seen that the ramifications of the canal question were the ultimate source of division, the "fons et origo" from which sprang the dissensions in the Democratic party at that period. But other issues were not lacking to create friction and rivalry between the different elements and leaders, to the detriment of the party.

³² Hammond, III, 283.

³³ Whitford, I, 169.

³⁴ *N. Y. Assembly Documents, 1845,*
No. 2.

CHAPTER III

OTHER ISSUES AND NAMES

FIRST among the secondary causes of dissension was the sharp contest arising out of the attitude and action of the Democratic state administration toward the banks within the state. President Jackson's crusade against the United States Bank had commanded the general and hearty support of the bulk of his party in this state, as was demonstrated by a unanimous vote in the committee of both houses of the legislature of 1831 upon a resolution commending him for it.¹ The efforts of the Bank to curtail its loans and to lay the blame therefor upon the President and his advisers for having removed the government deposits, had failed. They had served only to strengthen the administration and to benefit the state banks, which increased in prosperity day by day. This prosperity was reflected in the large number of applications made annually to the state legislature for charters to engage in the business of banking. In granting these charters, the majority in the legislature took care that the stock in the new banks should be placed in the hands of its friends, which tended, for the time being, to create a powerful interest attached to the party.

Presently, however, ugly rumors began to arise; and, during the session of 1836, the charge was openly made that some Democratic senators were guilty of improper practices in connection with the banks and other stocks. Proceedings were started in the Senate to remove two of them, Bishop and Kemble. Kemble anticipated the issue by resigning; Bishop was saved by a vote of 16 to 12, the most of the majority declaring that the Senate lacked the constitutional power to expel him unless after impeachment, and also that his offense was not proved to be deserving of such serious punishment. The matter, however, caused great scandal, and much bitterness within the party. Samuel Young, then a member

¹ *Albany Daily Argus*, April 25, 1831; editorial.

of the Senate, led the movement to have the men expelled, and resigned after the contrary decision. He was in close touch with Comptroller Flagg; and their correspondence shows the interest taken in their efforts. Among those who wrote to Flagg, commending his action, were A. C. Niven of Monticello, later prominent in the Barnburner movement, and James Hooker of Poughkeepsie.² Flagg sent summaries of the testimony to various editors, one of whom, G. J. Grosvenor of the *Geneva Gazette*, replied: "I shall endeavor to have published in this week's *Gazette*, the substance of Col. Young's report with a few comments of the nature you mention. In not mentioning this matter before, we have been in some measure governed by the course of the *Argus*, which we are accustomed to regard as sound in morals as in politics."³ Evidently, the *Argus*' editor considered it politically prudent and morally unobjectionable to observe discreet silence in a controversy that might involve no one knew how many public men.

During this period, also, serious apprehension began to be felt as to the probable results of the wild spirit of speculation that was sweeping over this as well as other states. Governor Marcy ably sums up the situation in his message for 1836:

There can be no mistake about the fact, and it should not pass unnoticed, that an unregulated spirit of speculation has within the last year prevailed to an unprecedented extent. . . . These operations have required something more than the use of our circulating credits. . . . The vacant lands in and about several of our cities and villages have risen, in many instances, several hundred per cent, and large quantities of them have been sold at prices, which seem to me to have been produced more by the competition of speculation than any real demand resulting from the increase of our population and actual prosperity. . . . Merchants and others have abstracted from their business a portion of their capital and devoted it to speculations in stocks and lands, and have then resorted to the banks for increased accommodations. To these causes I ascribe most of the embarrassment now felt for the want of sufficient bank facilities to conduct successfully our ordinary business concerns. The proposed remedy, judging from the applications, is to double the present number of banks, and nearly to treble the amount of banking capital. Before you apply this remedy, in whole or in part, you ought to be well satisfied that it will remove the difficulty, and that the use of it will not leave us in a worse condition than we are at present.⁴

² *Flagg Mss.*; Miscellaneous Letters, 1836.

³ *Ibid.*, May 22, 1836.

⁴ Hammond, II, 450 ff.

The Governor was undoubtedly right in his apprehensions; but his warnings fell upon deaf ears. The legislature chartered many new banks, and voted to extend the charters of more; nor did the Governor, in spite of his forbidding words, venture to veto any of these permits. Those, however, who did venture to oppose the craze, were looked upon with hatred by the friends of the banks. This hatred extended to the Governor himself, and eventually proved a powerful factor in his defeat.⁵

All through 1836 the mania went merrily on. In the midsummer, Jackson's famous Specie Circular dealt a hard blow to the speculators and to the banks. They resented this by attacking the President as well as the Governor; and in some sections, having no opportunity to be revenged upon the former, they voted against the latter. Thus, a letter from P. Reynolds, Jr., to Flagg, dated Fonda, Nov. 12, 1836, says "the disorganizers in Johnstown have combined with the Whigs and elected their Congressman, and possibly Assembly candidates, reducing the vote for Marcy from 639 in 1834 to 312."⁶ The causes of this, however, were probably mostly local, as Marcy received in the state as a whole the unprecedented majority of 30,000.

In the following year, the storm broke, and engulfed the powerful Democracy. The terrible panic of 1837 began May 10th with the suspension of specie payments by the New York banks. This action was immediately imitated by all the interior banks. The legislature happened to be still in session, and promptly suspended that portion of the safety fund act which would have required the banks to go into the hands of receivers when they ceased to pay specie. This allowed the banks to continue business, and they did their best to weather the storm.

There was, however, another measure that caused widespread inconvenience, annoyance, and loss. This was an act passed two years earlier⁷ that forbade the banks from issuing bills in denominations of less than five dollars. The banks, therefore, could not pay small bills in change, and they would not pay out specie. The people, therefore, who must have change, were forced to resort to the illegal but indispensable practice of using small bills

⁵ Gillet, Ransom H., *Democracy in the United States*, 127.

⁶ *Flagg Mss.*; Miscellaneous Letters.

⁷ Alexander, II, 17.

issued by the banks of other states. Now, many of those banks had become insolvent; hence their bills were really worthless. Senator Tracy now introduced a bill to repeal the troublesome law; but his bill failed, by a vote of 15 to 13, Samuel Young again leading the opposition. Some time later, the people of Broome County in vexation petitioned Governor Marcy to ask the legislature again to repeal the law; but he refused, alleging as a reason that the proposal had already been made and defeated. Thus, during the whole of that fatal summer, the people of New York suffered from all the evils of the national crisis, aggravated by peculiar ills of their own.

Meanwhile, President Van Buren had dashed the hopes of those who may have expected that he would yield to the dictates of "big business" and perhaps recall the Specie Circular or otherwise show favor to the friends of bank-paper and speculation. He brought forward the Independent Treasury plan, entirely divorcing the government from the banks. The friends of the banks were enraged, and they prepared to bolt this action of the party leaders. Under the lead of United States Senator Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, who but a little while before had, in the interests of the small banks, vigorously upheld the overthrow of "the" big one, the Conservatives, as they called themselves, held a convention at Syracuse, and decided not to support candidates who upheld the new policy in regard to public money. One of the leaders was Samuel Beardsley of Utica, who was held responsible for a series of articles which appeared during September in the Albany *Argus* over the signature of "Marshal," in which the wisdom of the President's recommendations was attacked, and resistance to them was advocated. Samuel J. Tilden, then a young man of twenty-three, attracted attention by a series of papers in reply, and next year debated the same subject with Tallmadge.⁸

At first, this revolt and other symptoms of discontent were not taken very seriously, as Flagg's letter of November 5th shows.⁹ But when the returns came in, and it was seen what a revolution in the Assembly membership had taken place,¹⁰ a warm discussion ensued as to the causes of such a result. Flagg wrote to the Presi-

⁸ *Cyclopedia of Contemporary Biography of N. Y.*, article, "Tilden."

⁹ See above, p. 10.

¹⁰ The Whigs elected 101 Assemblymen, as against 34 the year before.

dent on November 9th,¹¹ "The Conservatives, who in many instances were in stations of committeemen, etc., have played into the hands of the Whigs, and all the speculative class are rejoiced at the result." Many others shared in this view, and named circumstances to substantiate their belief. Thus G. B. Pettit of Fabius, writing to Flagg, November 7th, declares, "the Onondaga *Standard* has been 'bank-mad' ever since Gov. Marcy's message."¹² It fulminated against that and his subsequent message of 1837, hailed with delight the conservative doctrines of Senator Tallmadge . . . rejected the crowning measure of the President's message, advocated the interests of the money power by pleading for a return to small bills . . . " etc.¹³ C. C. Cambreleng wrote to the President, "The conservatives have everywhere openly united with the Whigs. I learned from a gentleman just from Poughkeepsie that Mr. Tallmadge and his friends voted the Whig ticket. We have now got rid of the traitors and are prepared for a fresh start."¹⁴ They had in truth got rid of Tallmadge, who thereafter acted as an independent. On the other hand, Ex-Governor Throop acquitted the banks of blame for the defeat. His proofs were that the greatest falling off in the vote came from the counties that had no banks or very few. He sent a clipping from the Cayuga *Patriot*, stating that that paper agreed with the Schenectady *Democrat* that the banks of those localities had held aloof from the contest; "the reports that prominent republicans in this village [Auburn] voted the Whig ticket are equally false, and are circulated to create jealousies."¹⁵ Yet even Throop admitted¹⁶ that the "small-note question" was the chief cause of the people's dissatisfaction. Most significant of all is the fact that, when Tallmadge's term in the United States Senate expired, in 1839, he was reëlected by Whig votes to keep his followers in the Whig fold.¹⁷ It is true, Tallmadge himself protested to President Polk in 1845,¹⁸ that he had always considered himself a Democrat; but the fact was well-recognized by all that his course was largely instrumental in putting the Whigs in power in this state,

¹¹ *Van Buren Mss.*, XXX, 6976.

¹² Of 1836; see above, p. 27.

¹³ *Van Buren Mss.*, XXX, 6976.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6981.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7053 and a.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7036.

¹⁷ Alexander, II, 38.

¹⁸ Polk's *Diary*, I, 57, entry for Oct. 14, 1845.

and thus enabling them, as we have seen, to initiate that financial policy which so embarrassed the state and divided the Democratic factions.

During all this period, the choice of most of the important state officials by joint vote of the legislature placed a powerful weapon in the hands of the dominant party and its leaders. The secretary of state, the treasurer, the comptroller, and the attorney-general, as well as the canal commission, the state printer, and the regents of the State University, derived their offices from the gift of the legislature. These were places of great dignity and authority, and considerable emolument; hence the bestowal of them was a fruitful subject of intra-party discussion and intrigue. Except for the brief period from 1838 to 1842, they were filled by Democrats, and most of the leaders whose names we have met were either candidates or incumbents.

When the legislative caucus of 1842 assembled, there was a particularly lively contest. The party had suffered the unusual deprivation of three years' absence from the spoils, and during that interval, financial developments had accentuated the differences of view as to the party's financial policy. The result of the balloting for comptroller, the office most vital, was that A. C. Flagg received 105 out of 107 votes cast; nevertheless, says Hammond, there were many who disliked his selection, "not because they distrusted his capacity or his integrity, but because an impression did prevail that he was too stringent in his notions in relation to the expenditures on the credit of the state for internal improvements."¹⁹ These men were able to gain the confidence of many who had great influence in the party councils, and their dislike of Flagg and his friends soon took tangible shape.

Finally, there were several subsidiary topics of national and state policy, of less practical importance than the Canal and Bank questions, but upon which the resentment of certain portions of the state and of the party had become wrought up. These included the affair of the sloop *Caroline*, the arrest and later release of McLeod, a British subject, and the Patriots' War of 1837-38 in Canada, a movement which had enlisted the sympathies of nearly the entire American border population, but which had been opposed

¹⁹ Hammond, III, 265.

by the stern official discouragement of both President Van Buren and Governor Marcy. These various matters and the treatment of them, had all contributed fuel to the fires of party discord that were smouldering but not extinct when the Democracy was awaiting its return to full power in the summer of 1842.

To the faction that demanded radical restriction of canal extension and the reimposition of a direct tax, there now began to be applied the picturesque but scarcely clarifying name of "Barnburners." The use of the term is not common before 1843; and its bestowal denotes the beginning of a bitter feeling prophetic of something more than a mere struggle for party supremacy. The term is said by some²⁰ to have originated in the angry charge of their opponents that the Radicals were none too good to be guilty of burning barns; that, in fact, they had condoned such excesses when committed by the radical element in Rhode Island, during the Dorr Rebellion there. This explanation seems fantastic; for there was no clear connection between the Rhode Island troubles, which were constitutional and political, and New York's financial problems. Hence, there was no more reason why the Radicals should have sympathized with the Dorrites than that their opponents should have done so. It would seem, too, that the name, if originated on such grounds, would naturally have been applied to the Anti-Renters, who were quite numerous at that very time. The assertion, however, made in Harper's *Encyclopedia* that "the radical Democrats sympathized with the Anti-Renters" is not borne out by the facts.²¹

Another explanation is, that the name grew out of a slighting remark that the policy of the Radicals in connection with public works resembled that of the legendary Dutch farmer who had burned down his barn to rid it of the rats—the implication being that the Barnburners were willing to destroy the public works and corporations to stop the abuses connected with them.²² This explanation was given by speakers on both sides²³ during discussion in the legislature, and it may be accepted as the true one. The name,

²⁰ Jenkins, John S., *History of Political Parties in the State of New York*, 570, footnote. Harper's *Encyclopedia of United States History*, I, article, "Barnburners," in which a letter of Thurlow Weed is quoted as authority.

²¹ See *Democratic Review*, XXVII, 529 ff.

²² *N. Y. Tribune*—date not given—quoted in Jenkins' *History*.

²³ Stanwood, Edward, *History of the Presidency*, 229.

like so many other appellations, both political and religious, was for a long time used only by the enemies of those to whom it was applied; but in 1847, at the celebrated Herkimer convention, Samuel Young, one of their oldest and ablest leaders, accepted the designation. "Gentlemen," said he, "They call us barnburners. Thunder and lightning are barnburners sometimes; but they greatly purify the whole atmosphere, and that, gentlemen, is what we propose to do."²⁴ From that time on, such they continued to be called and, however unjustly, such they will doubtless continue to be known to history. Strictly, however, they should be called Radicals until after the election of 1846,²⁵ and this usage I shall follow here.

To their rivals for party supremacy, the equally inappropriate and mystifying name "Hunkers" or "Old Hunkers" was given. This was supposed to ridicule their strenuous efforts to get a large "hunk" of the spoils of office;²⁶ though, as Greeley slyly observed, "we never could discover that they were peculiar in *that*," and it is true that during the epoch of the struggle, the Barnburners probably surpassed their rivals both in getting and keeping the offices. The name Hunkers is useful, however, in distinguishing the friends of the canals from those other Conservatives who followed Tallmadge in the revolt of the bank forces.

²⁴ Weed, Thurlow, *Autobiography*, I, 534.

²⁵ Mr. Doolittle said, in the state convention at Syracuse, 1847: "they did not use such epithets in the country. When he came here, he scarcely knew to which side he belonged." *Argus*, Oct. 17, 1847.

²⁶ Another but less probable explanation is that it is derived from the Dutch word "honk," a post or station, reflecting on their supposed stationary attitude toward reforms. See Harper's *Encyclopedia of United States History*, *ut supra*.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST YEAR OF GOVERNOR BOUCK'S ADMINISTRATION

IT is notoriously true that the best alleviator of party dissension is a period of exclusion from public office. So, as the autumn election of 1842 drew near, the Radicals and the Hunkers showed an inclination to sink their differences in order to muster the full party strength and thus to regain control of the state administration. The man selected as the candidate of the united party for the governorship was the amiable and moderate Canal Commissioner, William C. Bouck. Bouck had the political advantage of being by vocation a farmer. I say "advantage," because at that time it was farmers rather than lawyers who predominated in the favor of the voters for public offices of the state. For instance, there were in one Assembly 51 farmers to 25 of the next most numerous vocation. In his avocation, however, that of an officeholder, he was even more experienced and better known. Some of the Radicals were not without misgivings as to the probable effect of Bouck's election; for their rage was hot against the Canal Commissioners. Hoffman wrote gloomily, "If, as is probable, Bouck is to be nominated, this is our last hour. In it, let us do our whole duty to the Democracy."¹ But, for the most part, opposition was stilled.

Bouck was nominated as a compromise candidate—it being understood that he would not hinder the "Stop and Tax Law." He was elected by 21,881 plurality, carrying 43 out of 59 counties. His real attitude upon the tender subject of canal extension might have been assumed to be rather friendly to such work, from his long and rather lucrative connection with it, and such indeed was the fact. The Radicals, however, may have counted at this time upon Martin Van Buren's influence with Bouck to keep the latter within

¹ *Flagg Mss.*, Hoffman Letters; letter of July 27, 1842.

bounds. Van Buren, indeed, was the Governor's political mentor; but the ex-President had hitherto shown little interest in the fundamental principles of the Radicals. It was perhaps his general affiliation with some of their leaders, such as Flagg, and his historic stand for financial solvency, that led them to expect his aid in controlling the new governor. With the other prominent state officials, Bouck's relations were not close or cordial. They distrusted him, and did not take him into their confidence. They seem neither to have feared his power nor respected his following; but Bouck, though not a dominating personality, had nevertheless much industry and some shrewdness, and was not a man to be despised with impunity. He set out at his earliest opportunity to build up his own "machine," after the familiar habit of governors, and by the customary methods.

Bouck's first message, transmitted to the legislature on January 4, 1843, was a plain, intelligible, and unambitious paper of moderate length. Its tone was conciliatory, as befitted its sponsor and the delicacy of his situation. It was really the work of Van Buren, to whom Bouck had applied, promptly upon his election, for guidance. Van Buren's reply, the original draft of which, dated Dec. 7, 1842, is still preserved, much underlined and annotated,² gave Bouck rather more than a skeleton outline, with suggestions such as "Here insert figures, of State debt," etc., for the Governor's other advisers to supply. The message contains more discussion of national affairs than is usual in such a paper, and several passages were evidently intended as campaign material for the following year. Considerable attention is devoted to the state finances, with exhortation to economy; but, nevertheless, the suggestion is timidly made that "the completion of the unfinished work at the Schoharie creek, at Sprakers . . . would be essentially useful, and some of it may be indispensably necessary." Even "the speedy completion of the Black River Canal and feeder to and including the summit level, and the Genesee Valley Canal, as far as the first feeder . . . is doubtless anxiously desired by the friends of these improvements. I do not feel that I should faithfully discharge my duty did I not recommend for your careful consideration these portions of the public works. This should of course be done with strict reference to the financial condition of the state."³

² *Van Buren Mss.*, XLIV, 10434.

³ Hammond, III, 319.

In these suggestions, the Governor was expressing his own sentiments, for Van Buren had little personal interest in the public works. Moreover, he had emphatically warned the Governor of the dangerous ground he was treading, when he suggested to him the use of the following language:

It can with great truth be said that no public question has ever been more fully and undisguisedly presented to the decision of the people than has the policy adopted by the last legislature in regard to the internal improvements of the State and the provision they had made for the support of its credit. The result was an . . . overwhelming and almost unprecedented majority of the people in their favor. My appearance before you this day in the character of the chief magistrate of this State is an item in that result, . . .⁴

The fact that Bouck chose to offer his own plans, even when they did not accord with such potent advice, reveals his earnest predilection for a liberal canal policy. The Radicals clearly saw this, and they were instantly alert to prevent any attempt by the Governor to undermine the Stop and Tax Law.

Their suspicion was reflected in the uneasy tone of the comment on the message. Silas Wright, acknowledging a copy, wrote that it was "simple and plain,"⁵ but warned the Governor against urging one measure rather than another upon the legislature, as politically inexpedient. Democratic papers generally extended the usual stereotyped approval, but could not be said to be enthusiastic. The *Buffalo Courier* "thinks the Governor is over-sanguine when he expresses the opinion that all the public works can be finished,"⁶ and also makes the criticism, based upon other recommendations of his, that he is of "a cautious turn of mind, which has rather led him astray in favor of what is established than in pursuit of those reforms so much needed by society." Most savage of all, though concealed as yet in private correspondence, was the resentful opposition of Michael Hoffman, "Admiral" Hoffman as he was called, from his long service as chairman of the Committee on Naval Affairs in the national House of Representatives, and heretofore mentioned as the framer and advocate of the Stop and Tax Law.

⁴ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLIV, 10434, *passim*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, XLV, 10646.

⁶ *Daily Mercantile Courier*, Buffalo, Jan. 11, 1843.

Hoffman's knowledge of financial subjects was admittedly the soundest of any man's, and his use of it is well illustrated in a striking passage of Henry Stanton's:

In 1843, I spent a week or two in Albany, where a bill in regard to the enlargement of the canals was pending. For four days the debate shed darkness rather than light over the subject, and the chamber grew murky. One morning, a tallish man, with iron gray locks drooping on his shoulders, and wearing a mixed suit of plain clothes, took the floor on the canal bill. . . . The first sentences arrested my attention. A beam of light shot thru the darkness, and I began to get glimpses of the question at issue. Soon a broad belt of sunshine spread over the chamber. I asked a member, "Who is that?" "Michael Hoffman" was the reply.⁷

Hoffman, as stated above, had long been suspicious of Bouck; and now, in his letters to Flagg, he vented his anger in characteristic phrases. "Such a message sent into such a mass of discontent . . . sent from those that could not to those that would not see, . . . was the boldest push ever made by idiot debt-loving Brigandism to bring on . . . a load,"⁸ etc.; and again, more argumentatively:

By their election, the nominees of the Democratic State Convention were commissioned to perfect and execute the system of policy begun at the last session of the legislature. The message [of Governor Bouck] contained no distinct definite plan of legislative or constitutional retrenchment or reform. Without the Executive lead, in a business so difficult, there is little reason to hope for success. . . . I am in favor of immediate bold and decided action. . . . The hope of a constitutional reform on the subjects of legislative power over expenditure, debts, banks and currency brought the present party into power. It was promised: every Democratic paper advocated it, and none ever opposed it: in the session of 1841 every Democrat voted for it, every Whig against it. The same is substantially true of 1842, and no Democrat in either session ever ventured an argument against it. After this decided action, to change sides on coming into power is such an open profligacy . . . as has never been exhibited on this side of the Atlantic!⁹

Thus, from one side, Governor Bouck was accused of being too sanguine and ambitious; from another, of being too stagnant.

⁷ Stanton, Henry B., *Random Recollections*, 85. 1843.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Mar. 16, 1843.

⁸ *Flagg Mss.*, Hoffman Letters; Dec.,

How far from real harmony was the seeming solidity in the party ranks was soon revealed by a fierce personal controversy, destined to have lasting consequences of a sinister nature. The office of state printer was one of the choicest plums in the gift of the legislature, conferring not only financial profit but journalistic prestige and political power upon its incumbent. For many years this coveted post had been conferred upon Edwin Croswell, the editor of the Albany *Argus*, a man whom we have already noticed as an influential member of the Regency. Croswell was just the man to take full advantage of such a post. Country-born and humbly bred, he had worked his way up through every grade of journalistic service until he had attained the very top.¹⁰ Courteous and kindly in manner, suave and diplomatic by preference, he yet could wield a cutting and redoubtable pen, and could marshal figures and arguments in a way to bring strength and confidence to his friends, and confusion to his enemies. Few American journalists ever exhibited more ability in conducting controversy, or in quieting animosities among his own friends, than Edwin Croswell.¹¹ He had been in boyhood the playmate as he was now in manhood the worthy antagonist of the great Whig editor and politician, Thurlow Weed, whose Albany *Evening Journal* then held the same post of dominance in that party that was later occupied by Greeley's *Tribune*. In the generation just preceding that of those newspaper giants, Dana, Greeley, and Raymond, Croswell was easily first in reputation and influence among the political writers of New York State.

The *Argus*, originally established in 1813 as the organ of the Tompkins faction of the Democracy, had been since 1820 the official paper of the state, except during the short period of Whig domination after 1838, when the honor had passed to the *Journal*, through Weed. From its beginning, the *Argus* had enjoyed remarkable prosperity. Before the sixth month, it had acquired a circulation of 4000, which exceeded that of any other paper in the state;¹² and, in the years that followed, it had gained steadily in patronage and power. Its editorials were scanned with great care by party

¹⁰ Alexander, I, 374-375.

¹¹ Howell, George R., *History of Albany Co.*, part I, 359.

¹² Letter of Joel Munsell to the Committee of the Printers' Festival, Rochester, in *Argus*, Jan. 12, 1847.

Democrats throughout the state, and were accepted as orthodox doctrine in the field of politics.¹³ Occasionally, when one of them seemed to exceed or to fall short of the ideas of some leader, he would write to suggest an amendatory or supplementary expression; but, as a rule, Croswell's dicta, usually framed with care after consulting the other leaders at Albany, were authoritative.

In the early differences between the Radical and the Conservative Democrats, Croswell had observed his usual tactful neutrality. Party predominance was what he chiefly sought, and to this end harmony was essential. The subject of canal extension and the accompanying financial arrangements was not a matter of principle to him, as to Flagg and Hoffman. He trusted and believed that, in this matter, as in others, the voice of the party, spoken through a majority, would be conclusive and that, after such a desirable conclusion, no premature criticism of either side should rankle behind. During all this period, Croswell's impartiality was so unexceptionable that not even the most sensitive factionists, though some of them did suspect him of time-serving,¹⁴ could venture to attack his published views.¹⁵

Now, however, the prudent editor ran foul of a time-honored Democratic tenet and practice, that of "rotation in office." It had long been felt and occasionally remarked that his many years' tenure of the state printer's post must have enriched Croswell unduly, in comparison with his fellow editors. It now began to be asserted that he ought not again to become a candidate for his old-time place, but let another deserving Democrat have it. This feeling found a candidate in a most unexpected quarter, none other than in the *Argus* office itself. Croswell, who since 1831 had been in partnership with his nephew Sherman Croswell, had lately taken into the firm Henry W. Van Dyck, who had formerly published a paper at Goshen, Orange County. Van Dyck now came forward and demanded that Croswell step aside, and let him have the state printership, alleging that such an agreement on Croswell's part was one of the terms on which he had become a partner in the *Argus*. This Croswell denied; he offered to compromise by

¹³ See above, p. 27.

¹⁴ Letter of Flagg, *Van Buren Mss.*, XXX, 6973.

¹⁵ Speech of Rufus W. Peckham to the Jury in Croswell-Cassidy Libel Suit; *Argus*, Feb. 15, 1847.

merely having the *Argus* named the state paper, without specifying who should be state printer. This offer Van Dyck refused, on the ground that, as the two Croswells owned two-thirds of the *Argus*, he would be overruled and the advantages flow to them as before. Another conciliatory offer, which would have made Van Dyck and the younger Croswell joint holders of the coveted office, was rejected for the same reason.

The struggle was now transferred to the legislature. A bill was brought in by Senator Denniston, providing for the appointment of a state printer by joint ballot, as in former years. Senator Foster promptly moved an amendment, vesting the appointment in the Governor, as it was believed that Governor Bouck was certain to appoint Croswell. Flagg and other state officers opposed the amendment, and thereby aligned themselves against the Governor and made evident to all the dissension among the party leaders. In the contest that ensued, Flagg was not disposed to conciliate. Hammond, in his contemporary account of the affair, says that he does not understand why Flagg should have opposed Croswell. Flagg, however, had for some years been suspicious of Croswell's attachment to what the Comptroller believed the essentials of Democratic doctrine. In 1837, Flagg had written to Van Buren: "It has appeared to me that for 3 years Mr. Croswell has been so much engrossed with business, and some of it of a speculating character, that his mind has been drawn off from the political department of the paper. . . ."¹⁶

It is true that in 1840-1841, Croswell had been associated with Flagg in the publication of a radical paper, the *Rough-Hewer*, at Albany, but it was precisely in that undertaking that the zealous Comptroller may have learned more of the lukewarmness of his associate's support. In like manner, the *Argus'* apparently loyal support of the Stop and Tax Law of 1842 can readily be explained on the ground of its well-known "regularity." Flagg was also undoubtedly aware of Van Dyck's radicalism, for Van Dyck had been a correspondent of his while still in Goshen, and had sought Flagg's approbation for his editorial articles.¹⁷

The struggle that ensued was marked by considerable feeling.

¹⁶ *Van Buren Mss.*, XXX, 6973.

May 7, 1836.

¹⁷ *Flagg Mss.*, Miscellaneous Letters;

In the Senate, Foster's amendment was adopted, ten Democrats voting for it and six against it, while two others, known to be against it, were absent. In the Assembly, meantime, exactly the opposite procedure had taken place, an amendment being carried, requiring the choice of a printer by joint ballot. In the end, the Hunkers in the Senate agreed to this solution, probably because they saw they could control the caucus. When the law had been passed, Croswell obtained the caucus nomination, receiving sixty-six votes, while Van Dyck withdrew as a candidate; whereupon the Radicals cast most of their forty-two votes for William Cullen Bryant, the scholarly editor of the New York *Evening Post*, who from this time forth was identified with their side.

Ex-Governor Marcy, who was at that time living in private life in Albany, was an interested spectator and certainly a competent judge of this contest. On January 27th, he wrote ex-President Van Buren: "The printing question has been quite bunglingly managed on both sides. If Van Dyck had played his cards well, Croswell could not have been elected, unless in conjunction with him. . . . There is certainly a tendency to schism—a division may be avoided, but this is not so easy as you may think."¹⁸ We may believe that Marcy used his best efforts to avoid the schism he foresaw, but with what little result we shall soon see.

Perhaps the most fateful result of this contest was the rise to prominence of the Albany *Atlas*, a paper in which Van Dyck published his attacks upon the Croswells. The *Atlas* was started in 1841, and at first attracted no special attention; but it soon came under the management of James M. French and William Cassidy, two capable and aggressive young men; and, as usual, the voice of youth was more outspoken and less heedful of conventional precedents and consequences than the cautious tones of experience. This attitude of the *Atlas* was quickly seen and made use of by Flagg and his associates. After 1843, the *Atlas* continued to be the organ of the Radicals, and rapidly undermined that dominant influence which the *Argus* had enjoyed with the Democratic masses. In doing this, it dealt a serious blow to party discipline and prestige, and contributed in no small degree to the party disasters that were soon to come. An interesting circumstance connected with this

¹⁸ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLIV, 10628.

paper was that, through the marriage of French with the sister of John Van Buren, the latter brilliant young man came to have a voice in the Radical paper; and the decided enemies as well as the devoted friends whom he made by his vigorous personality readily identified their feelings toward him and his father with their attitude toward the Radical cause.

Even the leading persons in this fight, and the politicians whose futures it was to affect most seriously, seem not to have foreseen the full consequences of it. Croswell, writing to Van Buren on February 4th of his resentment at the attacks upon his character and position by a factional press, of which "Mr. James M. French is the principal and the only responsible owner,"¹⁹ professed a feeling of surprise and indignation; and declared that he was "hurt by being deserted, nay opposed," by some on whom he had relied. He reaffirmed his attachment to Van Buren and the principles he represented, which he "has proved by 25 years of service." A duplicate of this letter was sent to Silas Wright, who concluded that "by a pretty strong implication, at least, he was . . . making me more responsible for the supposed affairs of John and French than he intended."²⁰ From that time on, Wright and Croswell seem to have been mutually suspicious; for, in the summer of the same year, we find Wright saying: "Of one thing I have certainly no ground to complain of our friend of the *Argus*. Whenever our paper²¹ prints an article that he seems to consider worth calling for notice, he is certain to make allusion to its source much less complimentary to his brother editor than he may suppose it to be to me."²² This lack of friendship between two men who were to occupy the leading places, the one officially, the other unofficially, in the party during the crucial period soon to come, was a circumstance destined to play havoc with the party's success.

But this fight was not the only subject of internal dispute by that same legislature. Another equally tactless quarrel arose over the interpretation of the Book Distribution Law of 1842. A law had been passed directing the Secretary of State to furnish each senator and assemblyman with ten copies of an elaborately bound

¹⁹ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLV, 10653-54.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, XLVI, 15767. Letter to Van Buren, Feb. 7, 1843.

²¹ The *St. Lawrence Republican*, print-

ed at Ogdensburg.

²² *Flagg Mss.*, Silas Wright Letters; Wright to Flagg, Aug. 4, 1843.

report on the geology of the state, the bill for which aggregated some thousands of dollars. Secretary Samuel L. Young, however, not only refused to furnish these, but wrote a scathing attack upon the legislature for presuming to make such a provision. Probably he was aiming not so much at this particular law as at earlier loans of credit to banks, etc. So severe were his strictures that the Senate, controlled by his own party, officially replied to him and in turn denied his right to criticise. Lieutenant-Governor Daniel S. Dickinson likewise took up the issue; and it was fought out in the newspapers.²³ This incident added to the bad blood existing.

The matter of Governor Bouck's distribution of patronage was a still sorer issue. Radical senators, as Ruger of Jefferson, alleged that the Governor had selected objectionable men for local offices within his power of appointment in their districts; and they blocked and defeated such nominations. They also declared that their Hunker colleagues, as Foster of Oneida, were getting their friends and associates appointed to lucrative positions for which Radical candidates were barred. As, prior to this, legislative interference with gubernatorial appointments of the same party had been rare, we can readily understand what a commotion must have resulted from the wholesale rejection of Bouck's appointments. Hammond declared²⁴ that the Governor's appointments were really directed by a desire to conciliate both sides, but that this "temporizing policy" was bad. Flagg testified that "the whole seems to be a matter of traffic, and the office of senator is sought as a means of peddling out executive patronage. . . . It is not surprising that senators who engage in these operations should regard them as of more importance than the success of the party."²⁵

It was during this session too that the definite demand for a convention to frame a new State Constitution began to find free expression. The Constitution of 1821 had become obnoxious in many parts. True, some of its unpopular features, such as the restriction placed on election of officials, had been modified by constitutional amendment. But there remained as weak points, whose weakness it seemed could be remedied only by a sweeping revision, the judiciary clause, and, most of all, the debt or taxation clause.

²³ Hammond, III, 356.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 339.

²⁵ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLVI, 10814-15.
Letter to Van Buren, Apr. 12, 1843.

The Radicals strenuously asserted that a legislature could not be trusted to abstain faithfully from creating new unproductive debts. Let this be made a topic for popular action only, the Radicals said, and the legislature's greedy hand will be stayed; it will confine itself to measures of real necessity, to the manifest gain of the popular welfare and the state credit. Hoffman had already said to Flagg: "I say to you what I do not hesitate to avow to others . . . if we are to have further loans and additional debts, I go for a convention and a new constitution. Monopoly may hiss and locality may yell, but a convention of the people must be called to sit in judgment on the past and command the future."²⁶ Most of the Radical leaders soon followed Hoffman's lead in coming out for a convention, while the Hunkers took the other side. Governor Bouck identified himself with the latter, and succeeded in staving off for a time the final outcome.²⁷

The policy of the Whigs, as between these factions, was dictated by their natural eagerness to sow dissension and accumulate political credit. Whichever course seemed most likely to produce or to prolong dissension among their opponents, that was the course they supported. In the matter of the appointments, they acted with the Radicals; on the Book Distribution law, with the Hunkers; in the printership quarrel, with the Hunkers; while, in the agitation for a constitutional convention, they joined with the Radical advocates of that course. As a result of clever manœuvering, the Whig minority succeeded in widening very considerably the breach in their opponents' ranks, without exposing themselves to the charge of political inconsistency. On the whole, the first year of Governor Bouck's administration sadly failed to justify the expectations formed when he was put forward as a compromise and conciliatory candidate in 1842.

As the legislative session approached its close, the party leaders began to fear lest the bitterness produced by these various subjects of dispute between the factions might prevent their uniting on

²⁶ *Flagg Mss.*, Hoffman Letters; Letter of Aug. 3, 1842.

²⁷ In the fall of 1843, a meeting of 50 members of the Radical faction was held in Albany, and adopted resolutions foreshadowing somewhat the later ac-

tion of the convention. The Hunkers received the proposition coldly. In January, 1844, Governor Bouck devoted much of his second annual message to arguing ably against it. (Adapted from) Hammond, III, 385-389.

the customary address to the people. Influence was therefore brought to bear upon the malcontents, with the result that when adjournment did come, on April 18th, an address was adopted with apparent unanimity, which expressed approbation of Governor Bouck's administration. Flagg says that Senator John C. Wright, one of the Hunker leaders, threatened that he and his friends would not sign any address unless this approval were given;²⁸ and he adds: "I have directed all my efforts to get the committees on address and resolutions to harmonize, so as to break up respectfully. . . ." And again, he writes grimly, "King has made himself extremely useful among the savage tribes."²⁹

During the summer, both sides worked actively to control the county and senatorial conventions, the usual issue between them being that of indorsing Governor Bouck's administration. In Schenectady County, the Radicals, led by former Senator A. C. Paige, voted down such a resolution, 34 to 15, whereupon some of the Hunkers went with the Whigs, enabling them to carry the election.³⁰ In Cayuga County, the local ticket was reported to be endangered by the opposition of the Governor's friends to George Rathbun, the Radical leader there, whose appeals caused Marcy to write to three Hunker leaders, but without much effect.³¹ In Herkimer County, where Michael Hoffman was the candidate for assemblyman, an attempt was made to get up a mass-meeting to "correct some of the errors of the convention." The Hunker strength in this county not being large, it was proposed quietly to scratch Hoffman's name. This aroused the latter's wrath, and he expressed himself forcibly to Flagg, "This *scratch* game is too mean for anything in the shape of man. . . . The Executive Chamber should be made to speak out on this subject, through its organ, the *Argus*. . . . I advise that some of you press this matter on Marcy, Croswell and Co. They must prevent it or be made responsible for it. The knife that scratches is theirs, and will be returned to them;"³² and he adds sarcastically, "Some think there is some confusion in these times. Captain Bouck sees through them as clear as mud, and finds harmony."³³ Albany,

²⁸ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLVI, 10814-15.

Letter of Flagg, April 12, 1843.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Apr. 15, 1843.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, XLVII, 11028. Letter of A.

C. Paige, Nov. 18, 1843.

³¹ *Ibid.*, XLVII, 11098-99, 11130.

³² *Flagg Mss.*, Hoffman Letters; Letter of Oct. 24, 1843.

³³ *Ibid.*

Ulster, and Rensselaer were other counties in which the spirit of strife proved too strong to quell. In Broome County, success came despite "pitiful schisms."³⁴

The state convention, however, was fairly harmonious. It met at Syracuse on September 5th, to select delegates to the national convention. On the day before, Flagg wrote to Van Buren that he believed the forthcoming state convention would be harmonious.³⁵ Colonel Young had agreed to withdraw as candidate for chairman in favor of Marcy, and would consent, though reluctantly, to an indorsement of Governor Bouck. Nevertheless, Young's name was presented for chairman, but he received only 40 votes to 79 for Marcy. In the controversy between Bouck and the other officials, the convention straddled the issue by adopting a resolution that "in him and the other distinguished individuals associated with him in the state administration, the convention recognizes a true devotion to the wishes and welfare of the people."³⁶ Both Van Buren and Silas Wright, who was his representative at the national capital, were very anxious to avoid discussing and perpetuating the factional disputes; and, in July, Wright had encouraged the convention of his county—St. Lawrence—to give the Governor a generous expression of confidence.³⁷ A month before the election, however, he wrote: "The appointment of delegates to the senatorial conventions and the nominations to the senate, so far as they have gone, indicate strongly to me that the old controversy of last winter is to be kept up, and the senate is to be relied upon to foster the corrupt influences and interests of the Beardsley³⁸ faction. . . . I know that our friend Croswell has been busy in producing this result, and the tone of his publication shows that those interests have become paramount to principle." Judging from the immediate results of the election, however, the feuds at Albany had not affected Democratic supremacy in the state. The party captured 92 out of 128 Assembly seats, and increased its representation in the Senate to 26 out of 32.

³⁴ *Van Buren Mss.*, Letter of D. S. Dickinson, Nov. 11, 1843.

³⁵ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLVII, 11028.

³⁶ Hammond, III, 365.

³⁷ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLVII, 10974-75.

Letter of Wright, July 14, 1843.

³⁸ Samuel Beardsley. He had opposed Wright's reelection to the United States Senate in 1837, and later was ousted by Radical votes from his own state office.

This very great predominance probably disposed the two factions to continue their quarrels. But it is true that these quarrels largely sprung out of matters of principle, particularly in reference to the public improvement policy. As Hoffman said at that time, "Most men will attribute most of the change in the vote for assembly since last year to the dissension at Albany last winter about appointments. But why did men divide in relation to appointments? Were we not in fact divided about measures, and that too on the most vital principles of public policy, and did not this diversity lead to all the dissensions?"³⁹

³⁹ *Flagg Mss.*, Hoffman Letters. Letter of Dec., 1843.

CHAPTER V

SEYMOUR'S CANAL BILL AND ITS RESULTS

WHEN the Assembly of 1844 met, it was organized by the Hunkers, who, in the party caucus, defeated Hoffman for Speaker by a vote of 56 to 35. The defeat, nevertheless, did not diminish Hoffman's influence. N. S. Benton, an opponent, testified later that "there are few if any instances . . . where a single member exerted such powerful influence as did Mr. Hoffman during this session."¹ Not anticipating this, evidently, Governor Bouck was encouraged to think that this legislature would be more sympathetic with his views than its immediate predecessors had been. So, in his message to the legislature, the Governor renewed, a little more strongly, his suggestion that something might be done for the canals. New York, he pleaded, was really not so badly off as some of her sister states; her prestige and prosperity were so vitally connected with her public works that no *safe* opportunity of improving the latter should be neglected; and a favorable opportunity was now presented by the unusually low cost of labor, due to the general financial depression.

Guarded as were the Governor's remarks, the Radicals instantly took alarm. Turning over that part of the message which related to the canals to the consideration of the Senate's Committee on Canals, they entrusted to Senator Robert Denniston, one of their ablest members, the duty of upholding their position taken the previous year. In due time, Senator Denniston brought in a report² which, from the Radical point of view, was a masterpiece

¹ *Papers Read before the Herkimer County Historical Society*, I. Concrete evidence of his power is found in a letter of Smith, assemblyman from Putnam Co., to ex-Congressman Gouverneur Kemble, now in possession of the latter's nephew, Mr. G. Kemble, of Cold Spring, N. Y. The letter discusses the renewal of the charter of the West Point Foundry

Association, in which the Congressman was interested, and says, "if Mr. H. had not been a member of our House, the charter of your ass'n would have been renewed without amendment or opposition."

² *N. Y. Assembly Documents*, 1844, no. 177.

in proving the necessity of continuing the Stop and Tax Law. He laid great emphasis upon the irregularities and extravagance of the work done upon the lateral canals, and showed that every one of them had cost several times what it had been estimated to cost when the work was ordered, and that the receipts from them had never reached nearly the sum that had been predicted. The Black River Canal, which had been estimated beforehand to cost \$417,000, would actually require \$2,431,000 to finish.³ The long-agitated Chenango Canal was a yearly expense to the state of over \$123,000. These were not new arguments. The Comptroller in 1835, the Governor in 1838, and both of them in other years, had pointed out like conditions, but without dissuading the legislature from beginning these works. Would Denniston's arguments prove more potent in preventing it from finishing them?

The Hunkers were equally alert, and, as they controlled the Assembly Committee on Canals, they also rendered a report, written by the future national leader, Horatio Seymour, which must fairly be admitted to be, in respect of cogency, logic, and persuasiveness, the superior of Denniston's, and which takes the opposite view.

The two reports, often quoted in contradiction, are not in fact wholly antagonistic. They differed in regard to the disposition of any surplus that might arise from the canal operations. Seymour believed there was likely to be such a surplus, and favored applying it toward defraying the expenses of enlarging the Erie and completing the Black River and Genesee Canals. Denniston doubted the likelihood of any such surplus, but favored applying what there might be to the extinguishment of the public debt. Both reports agreed, first, that a sinking fund should be established, which, within a given time, would ensure the extinction of the state debt; and second, that public works should be discontinued, rather than enlarge the state debt or check the sinking fund.⁴ With clever strategy, Seymour commended Azariah C. Flagg's policy of using only the surplus revenue of the canals for new works, condemning the less careful policy of the Whigs.⁵ He went on to urge that the situation would justify the use of some

³ It actually used up over \$2,800,000—
Alexander, II, 60. ⁴ Hammond, III, 415.

⁵ Jenkins, John S., *Life of Silas Wright*, I, 172 ff.

part of the revenues upon the unfinished sections of the canals, which otherwise must stagnate, to the injury of great sections of the state. This was a most plausible and winning argument, especially since it was evident that much dissatisfaction existed over the idle canals, and the competition of the railroads had not yet begun to be felt.⁶

Taking advantage of this sentiment, Seymour framed and safely guided through the legislature a bill which authorized the Canal Board to direct the completion of certain parts of the canal work as the public interest required, and to pay for these, if they were not interpreted as "repairs," out of any surplus revenues of the canal system. It also directed specifically the completion of two of the projects named by Governor Bouck in his message of 1843.⁷ The Radicals complained against this as an entering wedge in the encouragement of promiscuous canal extension. They were, however, powerless to withstand the eloquence of Seymour's logic and the cleverness of his management, coupled with the influence of the state administration. The measure, whose triumph was the first long step toward making Seymour the leader he afterward became, passed the Assembly by 29 majority, and the Senate by 4. Those numbers were almost identical with the majority of Whig members voting 'aye,' which shows that the Democrats were divided almost exactly equally between the two factions.⁸

This canal battle and other contests made the legislative session of 1844 no less exciting, though perhaps less acrimonious, than the stormy session of the year before. There was distrust, among both factions, of the aims of their rivals. When a debt-paying resolution was adopted in the Assembly, Flagg, while rejoicing in its success, questioned the good faith of the Hunkers who voted for it and prophesied vengeance on them if his suspicions should be correct.⁹ The Hunkers, on their part, accused the Barnburners of playing politics for the benefit of their leaders. Zealous Democrats in other parts of the state, who were not attached to either faction, became impatient and apprehensive under the long continuance of the fighting at Albany. Judge Vanderpoel reported

⁶ Hepburn, 60.

⁷ See above, p. 35.

⁸ The vote stood: Senate: Dem., 12

ayes, 12 noes; Assembly, of 38 noes, 4 were Whigs.

⁹ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLIX, 11451-52; Letter of A. C. Flagg, March 24, 1844.

to Van Buren on April 13th that "Mr. Wright says things at Albany are in a bad way. . . . They have not yet appointed a committee to draft an address. . . . I wish John was home; we want him at Albany."¹⁰ When the omission in regard to the address was rectified, it revealed that the split was considerably wider than the year before. Twenty-one Barnburners refused to sign the address drawn up, on the ground that it declared that "Wm. C. Bouck has adhered with fidelity to the sound policy which has ever characterized Democratic administrations, and has advanced the state in a career of safety and honor."¹¹ Judge Hand, of Washington County, in despair wrote to Van Buren: "At Albany all was confusion. . . . I was there at the adjournment. . . . Confidence seems now all gone. Our best men despair. . . . Your own nomination is in the natural order of things, I take it, unless fooled away by the folly of the New York Democracy. We may all have our opinions as to the griefs [sic], wrongs, principles and positions of both parties claiming to be the democracy of this state; now for me I deem these differences as partaking more of personality than of principle."¹² But neither his expostulations nor his recommendations could stay the storm, whose approach had already shattered the harmony which the ex-President, for reasons of his own, had so keenly sought.¹³ The situation was well summed up by the veteran Democrat, General Jacob Gould, who wrote to his chief: "There is not only no *harmony*, but no *cordiality* . . . while such men as ex-Gov. Marcy, Gov. Bouck, Croswell, Corning *et al.*, on one side, and Flagg, Hoffman, Young, McGowen on the other, are with their particular friends and all over the state doing all they can to annoy each other."¹⁴ When the votes were counted, the remarkable result appeared that, of all the ninety-odd Democrats of the warring Assembly, only one was reëlected! Is this an indication that Judge Hand's conclusion was correct, or does it rather show that neutrality was *at that time* an essential to election?

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Hammond, III, 433-434.

¹² Letter of A. C. Hand, May 11, 1844; *Van Buren Mss.*, L, 11738-39.

¹³ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLVIII, 11364; Reply of A. C. Paige to Van Buren.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, XLIX, 11520-21.

CHAPTER VI

THE CAMPAIGN OF 1844

AS the letters indicate, the state political situation at that time was secondary, in the thoughts of political observers, to the very interesting and delicate situation in national politics. The stormy administration of President Tyler, sneeringly called by his opponents the "constitutional fact," was drawing to a close, and it was quite apparent that his persistent efforts to build up a following strong enough to secure a renomination would fail. Men who associated with him or accepted appointments from him were tabooed, as in the case of George B. McWhorter, collector of the port of Oswego.¹ Memories of the campaign of 1840 were still keen; and the friends of the two rival leaders whose hopes had been thwarted in that sensational year looked forward to 1844 as the day of recompense.

In the Democratic ranks, Martin Van Buren had been constantly pushed as the "logical candidate," and with such success that his claims were almost universally recognized. From all parts of the Union came expressions of sympathy, admiration, and support. It was natural to expect that his own state would lend the "Sage of Lindenwald" its solid support; and very few were the voices in New York that ventured to object. There were some;² but they found it very hard to secure solid ground on which to base their objections. As early as 1842, Van Buren had been warned in a letter from ex-Governor Throop³ that Marcy was coquetting with

¹ Wright wrote to Van Buren "McWhorter has paid too dear for his whistle," and, "You had better not correspond with him if you can avoid it." *Van Buren Mss.*, XLVI, 10927.

² In Buffalo, for example, the weak Democracy had been made even weaker by the establishment of a factional paper, the *National Pilot*, edited by B. A. Manchester in the interest of the anti-Van Buren men, whose leader there was

George W. Clinton. *Publications of Buffalo Hist. Soc.*, XIX, 161 ff.

On the other hand, in Goshen, the Van Buren men started a rival paper to the pro-Calhoun *Independent Republican*, and secured for its editor Dr. T. W. Donovan, formerly in the Patent Office, but discharged by Tyler. *Van Buren Mss.*, XLVIII, 11202.

³ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLIV, 10376. Letter from Paris, Sept. 27, 1842.

the opposition; but nothing was openly said of it by either of the principals. Many of the Conservatives, too, were secretly disaffected, on account of the ex-President's Independent Treasury policy and his tariff views. But only a very few went to the length of arranging meetings in the interest of the candidacy of John C. Calhoun or Richard M. Johnson;⁴ and this was done with no serious hope of accomplishing anything locally for those candidates. Almost without exception, the Democratic newspapers of the state carried Van Buren's name at the head of their columns; all seemed well with New York.

In view of what happened four years later, it is interesting to notice here that most of the New Yorkers who were unfriendly to Van Buren at this time were men associated with the Radical side. The reason probably was, that they regarded him as still being what for many years his critics had asserted him to be, a time-server, without deep convictions. The Radicals were convinced by this time that they were the guardians of a lofty principle and that that principle was in danger. They applied the rule that 'they who are not with us are against us.' Thus, Hoffman, writing to Flagg on September 10, 1843, says bitterly, "In 1840, conservatism defeated Mr. Van Buren, but from the tone of the resolutions in Columbia⁵ and at Syracuse he seems to rely upon his old destroyer. . . . Radical Democracy [is] angry, sore and disappointed because Constitution and Reform have been smothered in Albany and buried in Columbia County."⁶ Fernando Wood, on February 20th previously, had testified: "They [the Calhoun men] say *confidentially* that there are nearly 50 members of the New York legislature who will refuse to [support?] Mr. Van Buren . . . , being for either Mr. Wright or Mr. Calhoun. They have received information from Albany that the radical disaffected democrats are very hostile to Van Buren and can by judicious management be won for Mr. Calhoun."⁷ Also, among the names signed to a Calhoun circular sent out from New York City on December 6th [1843], appeared⁸ the name of F. Byrdsall, the sympathetic historian of the Loco-focos, a radical of the radicals.

⁴ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLVI, 10878-79.
Letter of Thomas M. Carr, May 15, 1843.

⁵ Columbia was Van Buren's home

county.

⁶ *Flagg Mss.*, Hoffman Letters.

⁷ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLVI, 10771-72.

⁸ *Ibid.*, XLVII.

Besides Calhoun, who presently withdrew, and Johnson, there remained Buchanan, Cass, Marcy, and Woodbury, nominally representatives of the North, but conciliatory in a high degree to those Southern interests which had usually been dominant in previous conventions but which were now threatened with opposition from the awakening sectional consciousness of the North. The air was full of intrigue and opportunities for deals and combinations. Almost the only influences tending to check internal strife were hatred of Tyler's designs and ambitions, and fear of the success of Clay, who was sweeping all before him on the Whig side.

Into the midst of this atmosphere of uncertainty and strife there fell, barely six weeks before the day set for the National Convention at Baltimore, a bombshell in the shape of a letter written on April 20, 1844, by Van Buren to Congressman Hammit of Mississippi, in reply to a letter of inquiry sent by the latter, a month before. In this reply, Van Buren stated openly and without evasion that he was opposed to the annexation of Texas, a measure then under hot discussion by Congress and generally favored by the bulk of the party, particularly in the South. In response to similar inquiries from Hammit, Cass and Buchanan had avowed their support of the annexation scheme, and had thereby obtained preference over Van Buren for Southern support. In the mass of discussion of Van Buren's letter to Hammit, every circumstance connected with it, from his reasons for writing it when it was not absolutely necessary, to the particular advantage taken of it by his enemies, has been minutely examined. All investigators are agreed that the publication of the Hammit letter marks the turning-point in Van Buren's efforts to reach the White House a second time. From that moment, it became imperative upon the annexationists to secure the nomination at Baltimore of another than Van Buren, all the more so as Clay also had repudiated the Texas project, yet seemed certain of the Whig nomination, as indeed the event proved.

Already at the time his letter was published, Van Buren had been assured of a majority of the delegates, through instructions issued to them in his behalf by the conventions which chose them. There remained to his opponents, in this desperate predicament, but one promising recourse to thwart his success, and that lay in

forcing the re-adoption of the "two-thirds rule," first adopted by the convention of 1832. The convention met at Baltimore on May 27th, and the eyes of the whole country centred upon it, to the exclusion even of the proceedings of Congress, which continued in session, but a few miles away. The first surprise to the Van Buren men came when Hendrick B. Wright of Pennsylvania was chosen chairman, and the convention was organized in the interests of the "allies." Thus the opponents of Van Buren were called because, while dividing their votes among so many candidates, they were united in working against the favorite. The real fight was upon the adoption of the two-thirds rule, for it was abundantly clear, as a shrewd observer⁹ later reminiscently declared, that "at no time did Van Buren have a chance to obtain two-thirds of the total vote." In spite of this evident fact, enough of Van Buren's majority deserted him to assure the adoption of the fatal rule by a vote of 148 to 118. The loyalty of the 63 instructed Van Buren delegates who voted for this is certainly open to suspicion; the inference seems clear that they were simply seeking a convenient loophole to escape the consequences of nominating a man whose views were so distasteful to a large section of the party.

When the balloting began, Van Buren led all the candidates by a comfortable margin, Cass being second. But, with each succeeding ballot, his margin declined, until, on the fifth ballot, Cass' vote exceeded his own. Then the Van Buren managers, chief among whom was Benjamin F. Butler, realized the impossibility of what a few weeks earlier had seemed a certainty, and saw that they had been outgamed by the cunning devices of master politicians. They began to think of using the power which Van Buren had expressly put in Butler's hands by a letter authorizing the withdrawal of his name "whenever it shall be found necessary to do so to promote the interests and secure the harmony of the great democratic party of the Union."¹⁰ Butler next tried to get Wright nominated, but Wright's friend, Judge Fine, declared that, if Wright's name were presented, he would read a letter from Wright declining, and saying that "his [Wright's] views on *all* questions"—evidently including Texas—"entirely concurred with

⁹ George Bancroft, who was present as a delegate from Massachusetts.

¹⁰ Hammond, III, 462.

Van Buren's."¹¹ Thwarted thus by Wright's loyalty to his friend, the Van Buren managers turned to James K. Polk of Tennessee, previously a candidate for vice-president, and known as a friend and well-wisher of the New York leader. Polk was unanimously nominated on the ninth ballot, as a result of Van Buren's withdrawal in his favor. The "allies," in great exultation over this favorable outcome of a long doubtful issue, threw a sop to Van Buren in the form of a plank in the platform lauding the record and services of "our distinguished leader, ex-President Martin Van Buren." They could well afford this act of grace, for all the substantial spoils of victory were theirs—a candidate from their own section, openly pledged by letter to support annexation, and a resolution pledging the party to uphold the same course.

The convention fight had been won by the South; but the election was still to come. There the most popular man and the most magnetic campaigner in the country was still to be encountered in the person of the Whig idol, Henry Clay; and to defeat him, every element of party strength must be conserved. To add strength to the new ticket, therefore, the second place on it was overwhelmingly and enthusiastically bestowed upon New York's other and not less popular favorite, Silas Wright. Wright's lofty character and great ability were universally known; and moreover, he had for three years been the personal and political representative of Van Buren at the national capital. The intercourse between the men was of the closest nature; their copious correspondence reveals an identity of interests and ideals, fully confirming Wright's above quoted words to Fine. "I am, upon almost every day, risking your standing and fortunes, in a public sense, upon my own judgment,"¹² wrote the Senator to Van Buren, on one occasion; and again, "I did feel for a while almost entirely alone, but Fairfield and King¹³ are now my cabinet, and I can assure you they are coming to be a unit."¹⁴ Sometimes, in distrust of his own foresight, he would warn Van Buren that "most likely I shall one of these days by some bungling movement, or wrong vote, or in some other way

¹¹ Letter of Butler to Wright, written from New York City, May 31, 1844; *Van Buren Mss.*, LI, 11849-51.

¹² *Ibid.*, XLVI, 10767. Letter of Feb. 7, 1843.

¹³ Preston King. Wright praised King's political judgment highly.

¹⁴ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLIX, 11509.

break your neck and destroy your future prospects.”¹⁵ But at least the chief could rely upon the absolute faithfulness and high-mindedness of his friend.

When Van Buren's defeat did come, none was quicker to understand it or more sincere to regret it than the Senator. As soon as the information reached him that his own elevation was proposed, after his friend's disappointment, he instantly rejected the imminent honor of the vice-presidential nomination, even as his friends had done for him with the presidential. To make his resistance effective, he had to send King and another on a hasty and arduous night journey to Baltimore, for he learned that Butler, whose management at the convention had not been of the best, had accepted the nomination for him, in spite of his written instructions.¹⁶ On the announcement of Wright's withdrawal, the convention reassembled in obvious disappointment, and selected Dallas, of Pennsylvania, for vice-president.

As New York's delegates returned home, they brought with them and diffused throughout the party a sense of discontent and injustice that boded ill for future party welfare. They held the two-thirds rule undemocratic—a clever device for defeating the will of the party masses. One sentiment especially found root in their minds, and that was a desire for vengeance on the “allies,” and, above all, on Cass, who had so nearly become the beneficiary of the “treason” practised on New York's favorite. Men like James S. Wadsworth, who were not in Baltimore, found it hard to understand the sudden shift in events and breathed revenge on Cass and on all who had aided in his schemes.¹⁷ We shall see their resentment taking active shape, four years later.

The next current to be noticed in the sea of New York Democratic politics was the inception and growth of a demand for the substitution of Wright for Bouck as candidate for governor. Bouck himself desired a renomination, and party precedent seemed to require that he be given one. It was not until the spring of 1844 that the mutterings of discontent against him threatened to eventuate in anything serious. But then letters began to come in, declaring that Bouck could not be reëlected; in some counties, it

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, XLIX, 11444.

¹⁶ *Flagg Mss.*, Wright to Flagg, June 8, 1844.

¹⁷ *Van Buren Mss.*, LI, 11858-59, 11863. Letters of Wadsworth and Tracy.

was alleged, he could not obtain a fourth of the party vote; in the interests of harmony he should withdraw. The only other name mentioned was that of Wright. But, when Wright heard the suggestion, he discouraged it¹⁸ emphatically and, as he thought, effectually. The proposal to nominate Wright was started apparently by men who opposed Bouck politically because of the mistakes and conflicts of his administration, and these men as we have seen were Radicals.

On some points of principle, Wright was in sympathy with their views; but the mildness of his native temper forbade his expressing himself as harshly as did Hoffman and, to a less degree, Flagg. When first the talk for Wright began to be heard, it was especially embarrassing to Governor Bouck's friends, since Wright was not an avowed candidate—indeed was known to be averse to the nomination, and hence any vigorous opposition to his name might be construed as a gratuitous assault upon an unoffending man. Nevertheless, Governor Bouck wrote to Wright in April offering to withdraw in his favor, but Wright declined. Still the Wright 'boom' continued, fostered by the *Atlas* and by complaints from Cayuga, Tompkins,¹⁹ and other counties, that his nomination was necessary; and, after the Baltimore convention, it obtained unexpected and weighty accessions of strength. These were from the former opponents of Van Buren, friends of the new national ticket, who rightly feared and sought to overcome the weakness of that combination in New York. They boldly went to Wright and urged upon him that it was his duty, though it might not be his pleasure, to make the race for governor, to save New York to the national ticket and thus ensure its success. This was an argument especially calculated to appeal to Wright, who was a party man of the strictest sort. Personally, his inclination was all for remaining at Washington. In the atmosphere of the senate chamber, he was thoroughly at home. He had made an excellent record there, and would have asked nothing better than to remain. Moreover, he knew well the atmosphere of politics at Albany, and he dreaded it.

But all these personal considerations he felt must be laid aside

¹⁸ *Van Buren Mss.*, XLIX.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Letter of G. D. Beers of Ithaca.

at the need of the party that had honored him, and this he admitted to his interviewers. Efforts were now made to induce Bouck to withdraw, in the interest of harmony. But the Governor believed his dignity would not permit, at so late a period. He persisted as a candidate before the state convention, and in consequence was shelved by a vote of 30 against 95 for Wright. Addison Gardiner of Monroe County, an esteemed leader of Radical sympathies, received the nomination for lieutenant-governor. The campaign that followed was one of the fiercest ever yet fought in the state or throughout the nation.²⁰ The nomination of Wright seemed to be justified by the result, which was his election by 10,033 plurality, while Polk defeated Clay in the state by only 5,000. Van Buren's friends triumphantly pointed to this as proof positive of the feeling of Northern Democrats toward the work of the Baltimore Convention, praised the self-sacrificing Silas Wright, and continued to lay plans for the future justification of Van Buren. In these plans, Van Buren himself had little share. He seemed to feel instinctively that the failure of his party to avenge his rejection in 1840, and even more, his alienation from the party on the important issue of annexation put an end to all serious likelihood of his again leading the Democratic hosts in a national campaign; and he devoted himself more and more to a life of dignified retirement on his farm at Lindenwald.

²⁰ Joseph Stringham, in his reminiscences of early days in Buffalo, tells how, on the night of election, Albert H. Tracy, Dean Richmond, Philip Dorsheimer, and other leading Democrats of Buffalo, gathered in the *Courier* office, to await the signal of a friendly train

conductor who was to wave a lantern from his passing train if Polk's majority in New York City exceeded 3,000. "Of Silas Wright's election by about 5,000 we were satisfied." *Publications of Buffalo Hist. Soc., ut supra.*

CHAPTER VII

ADMINISTRATION OF GOVERNOR WRIGHT

WHILE the career of Van Buren was thus closing, that of Silas Wright seemed about to enter upon a new and more conspicuous phase. Wright brought to his unsought-for post of the governorship a reputation for spotless integrity which afforded no vulnerable point for his enemies to attack; a record of statesmanship at which none might cavil; and a native ability and force of character which rendered it certain that he would handle the delicate problems of the state administration in accordance with sound principles of economics and government. Having been for so long out of touch with state affairs, he was obliged to rely largely upon information sought from his friends, and these, as we have seen, were chiefly drawn from the Radical ranks. Among them was Flagg, with whom he corresponded regularly and in whose judgment he placed implicit confidence.¹ This circumstance naturally made the Hunkers dubious as to Wright's impartiality, and they prepared to protect their own interests if need should be.

The inaugural message of the new Governor was a far different paper from those of his predecessors. It was a long and elaborate state paper, dealing fully and in a straightforward fashion with all the most pressing political questions of the day. Nearly two-thirds of it was devoted to the discussion of the canal situation, with which Wright had been rather familiar ever since the time of his report to the State Senate in 1827. After reviewing the history of the canal work down to 1838, he discussed the new financial policy adopted upon the accession of the Whigs to power, in that year. He then stated the unfortunate results of that policy and the necessity for the law of 1842. He eulogized the beneficent results of that law, and recommended its strict maintenance and

¹ Thus, on the propriety of resigning his senatorship while making the race for governor, he took Flagg's advice; see *Flagg Mss.*, Sept. 25, 1844.

enforcement. He stated the two pending proposals for constitutional amendments growing out of the situation, and recommended their approval by the legislature. He analyzed the condition of the state debt, declaring that the charges against both the general fund and the canal fund were excessive and should be relieved. In the remainder of the message, he treated of the anti-rent difficulties, the educational system, and other current questions with frankness and cogency, and bespoke the coöperation of the legislature. The message was received by Democratic organs, both within and without the state, with praise; its tone was declared most admirable. Said the *Argus*,

There is a prevailing tone about this great state paper which cannot too frequently be called to mind, and that is its high moral tone. After a careful reading of Gov. Wright's message, all will see with proud satisfaction that every measure he approves, he approves because it is just and right.²

Nevertheless, it was at once apparent that the two factions within the party were very much alive, and very little inclined to reconciliation. The legislature contained, in the Senate, 28 Democrats, 3 Whigs, 1 Native American; in the Assembly, 68 Democrats, 44 Whigs, 16 Anti-Renters and Native Americans. The first fight came over the selection of a speaker of the Assembly. Although Horatio Seymour, who had drawn up the celebrated canal report of 1843, was the most experienced man on the Democratic side, and a man of recognized ability, his report and his active partisanship made him offensive to the Radicals, who therefore presented William C. Crain, of Herkimer, as their candidate. After a fight much hotter than usual, Seymour won the nomination, 35 to 30, whereupon all the Radicals supported his election. In the upper house, too, the factions were very evenly balanced. During the whole session, indeed during Governor Wright's term, their attitude of jealous watchfulness persisted, the Hunkers seeing in every move of the Governor and his friends a desire to "play politics" and make Mr. Wright the party nominee for president in 1848. The Radicals, for their part, were equally convinced that their opponents were mischievously embarrassing the State Administra-

² *Argus* editorial, Jan. 14, 1845.

tion, in the interest of national politicians, and aiming to upset the retrenchment programme of 1842.³

In this factional quarrel, the National Administration professed to be absolutely neutral. President Polk had been an associate of Governor Wright, when the latter was in the Senate; and he was a sincere admirer of the New York statesman.⁴ He had been, also, as we have seen, in sympathy originally with the effort to renominate Van Buren. He had expressed his regret at the failure of that effort in the following language: "With yourself⁵ I had regarded the nomination of Mr. Van Buren as morally certain. You are right, therefore, in supposing that I had not the slightest knowledge or agency in the events that led to a different result." Nevertheless, on the issue of Texas annexation, which had predetermined those "events," Polk was thoroughly Southern in sympathy. The President-elect acknowledged his great obligation to New York for its deciding vote in his favor, and planned to reward it, after the customary fashion, by appropriate appointments.

On December 7, 1844, Polk wrote to Wright in tones of the highest esteem, saying "You are the first and only person to whom I have given an intimation of my wishes on the subject of the cabinet."⁶ He offered him the post of Secretary of the Treasury, on the ground that he considered that post likely to be, during this administration, more important even than the State portfolio. In his reply,⁷ Wright discussed frankly not only his own situation, but that of the party in New York. He expressed the belief that Governor Bouck had made a mistake in choosing his friends. He added that he—Wright—was selected to replace Bouck for the sake of harmony within the state; therefore he could not resign without bad consequences, arising from suspicion of bad faith. He attributed his running ahead of Polk in the state's vote to support given him by Whigs in New York City who wanted a safe financial policy, hence no great expenditures for canals. He thought, on the other hand, that "you received more votes from members of

³ Hammond, III, 511-512.

⁴ "I have no doubt that Wright is his personal preference for the succession. He told me that he thought Mr. W. 'the first man in the country for any place in it.'" O'Sullivan to Van Buren, March 28, 1845. *Van Buren Mss.*, LII, 12265.

⁵ Ex-Congressman Kemble; letter from Columbia, Tenn., dated July 31, 1844, now in possession of Gouverneur Kemble, Esq.

⁶ Gillet, Ransom H., *Life and Times of Silas Wright*, II, 1631.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1633 ff.

the [Democratic] party than I did, because some of our canal counties cut me off to some extent, though less than I expected." Wright's whole letter breathed a spirit of conciliation and of confidence in Polk which he was destined later to lose.⁸

The President-elect also wrote to Van Buren, both on account of his presidential experience and his party position, and sought his advice as to appointments. Van Buren, taking the request seriously and sincerely, replied, "You did as I would have done in offering to Mr. Wright the Treasury instead of the State Department."⁹ He then proceeded strongly to recommend Butler for the State portfolio, because of his tact; and said he had already urged him [Butler] to consider it. "For the Treasury Department his pursuits have not adapted him; he would certainly not take it,¹⁰ nor could I advise him to do so." He recommended Flagg or Cambreleng for the Treasury post. "Flagg's reputation in this state stands higher, I think, as a financier, than that of any man who has ever gone before him . . . in redeeming the finances of the state, he has unavoidably brought himself in contact with the contractors on the public works, and they may unite with the late governor and his friends [to oppose the nomination] . . ." Wright made the same recommendations as did Van Buren.

But Polk soon learned—what Van Buren probably knew—that the appointment of those men would arouse bitter opposition.¹¹ He proposed instead to make Butler Secretary of War; and, upon the latter's declining it as too much out of his sphere, Polk evidently felt himself discharged from further responsibility to Van Buren and his friends. Dismissing Flagg and Cambreleng from consideration as having only provincial reputation,¹² he passed outside of New York for incumbents of both the coveted positions. At the same time, he bestowed the War portfolio, soon destined to be so prominent, upon William L. Marcy, whose sympathies were

⁸ On March 12, 1847, he wrote, "May God send the country safe deliverance from this frightful crisis when imbecility and roguery hold sway," etc. *Flagg Mss.*

⁹ Draft of letters of Jan. 18, Feb. 2, 1845; *Van Buren Mss.*, LII.

¹⁰ But a little later Van Buren complained that Polk should have offered it

anyway; and Butler would have taken it. *Van Buren Mss.*, 12197, 12228.

¹¹ Letter of O'Sullivan, March 28; also Hammond, III, 533. Cave Johnson said, "Calhounism and Cassism threatened open war."

¹² Letter of Polk to Van Buren, March 1; Letter of O'Sullivan, *ut supra*.

well known by the Van Burenites to be with their rivals. "Gov. Marcy stands—in reputation out of New York—next to Mr. Wright and Mr. Butler, and as far as I am informed accords with me in my political principles,"¹³ Polk explained. This whole procedure humiliated and irritated Van Buren as intensely as anything could affect one of his urbane temper. The most annoying element in the situation was the report transmitted to him by his son Smith, who made a special trip to see Polk and present a remonstratory letter, which the new Executive, according to Smith's story, scarcely deigned to read. "He kept me waiting, without opening the letter, which he kept turning over in his hand. I told him I would give him a résumé of it. He regretted that he had not got it sooner. . . . I fear he is completely captured by the rogues."¹⁴

But, while Polk could not see his way to accepting Van Buren's and Wright's recommendations for his cabinet, he did bestow several prominent positions upon adherents of their side. He named General Jacob Gould of Rochester, United States Marshal; and William F. Allen of Oswego, United States Attorney for the northern district of New York.¹⁵ The Hunkers were also vexed by the selection of Michael Hoffman to be Naval Officer of the Port of New York. This appointment Benton attributes¹⁶ to the personal acquaintance Hoffman had formerly enjoyed with Polk while both were in the House of Representatives; and, considering Hoffman's unusual qualifications, it may well be that Polk made this as a personal selection. Finally, the President prevailed upon Butler to accept the post of United States Attorney for the southern district of New York, and upon Cambreleng to become Minister to Russia. Both of these were respectable posts, but, Van Buren thought, far below the men's deserts, and an affront to himself. He was convinced that he would have little influence with the new administration, and he fell into a state of mind calculated to entertain, as we shall see, suggestions hostile to the administration and to party harmony. In his letters to Polk, during this time, the ex-

¹³ Letter of Polk to Van Buren, March 1, 1845.

¹⁴ Letter of Smith Van Buren, Feb. 27, 1845. *Van Buren Mss.*, 12228-29.

¹⁵ For the latter position George W. Clinton had been a candidate, and he now wrote, "This result is mortifying, and I

am, I confess, utterly at a loss to account for it, after the almost positive assurances I received when at Washington. The most natural supposition is that my sin was anti-Van Burenism." *O'Reilly Mss.*

¹⁶ Benton, 335.

President had discussed the factional issues in New York frankly and without withholding names, and he doubtless regretted having spoken so freely when he saw Polk inclined to slight his advice. The Radicals of New York generally believed¹⁷ that Polk's course in the matter was insincere and shifty, and that his offers to Wright and Butler of positions which he must have known they would not accept were mere political tricks intended to save him from the charge of partiality, of which, nevertheless, they held him to be actually guilty.

Before this matter was settled, a still more vexatious contest arose within the state itself, which pitted the two factions against each other and aroused rivalries and heartburnings of the same kind as those that had come out in the state printership fight, but of greater violence. When Wright was nominated for governor, he had resigned from the senatorship, and about the same time his colleague, Senator Tallmadge, had also resigned to accept appointment as governor of the Territory of Wisconsin. To fill these vacancies, Governor Bouck had named his colleague, Lieutenant-Governor Dickinson of Broome County, and Henry D. Foster, the former senator for Oneida. Both of these men were Hunkers; and as the time drew near for the new legislature to reëlect them or designate their successors, the *Atlas* and other Radical organs began to attack their political records. Foster's record, in particular, was subjected to harsh criticism. This led to spirited defense by his friends; but eventually Foster's name was withdrawn in the interests of harmony. That this hope of harmony was not realized appears from the fact that thereafter Cassidy, the caustic editor of the *Atlas*, took malicious delight in referring to the late appointee as "ex-temporary Foster," and that Foster's friends in Oneida retaliated on Governor Wright at the first opportunity by converting a favorable majority of 821 in that county in 1844 to a majority of 1337 against him in 1846.¹⁸

The Radicals presently united upon John A. Dix as their candidate to replace Foster, and, realizing their inability to defeat Dickinson, planned to force a postponement of the election for the six-year term until after March 4th. By that time they confidently

¹⁷ Statement issued by Van Buren, May 3, 1848. *Van Buren Mss.*, LIV, 12782. Stanton, 82.

¹⁸ *George W. Smith Mss.*

expected to enjoy the prestige of being the representatives of the National Administration through their leaders whom Polk should place in the Cabinet. The caucus was called to meet on the 18th of January; and, on the 16th, Butler wrote to Van Buren, "I could personally have no objection to either Dickinson or Foster, provided Dix or some other fit man of the other faction be appointed with him; but the appointment of two from the same side of the house was a palpable violation of justice. . . . If so, *the division in our ranks which under any circumstances must ultimately take place* will be hastened";¹⁹ and on the next day Wright expressed himself similarly: "I hope the result of the caucus this evening will be no worse than Dix and Dickinson. It certainly cannot be better,"²⁰ and I have yet some fears it may be the very worst."

The caucus met as scheduled, with 93 members in attendance. Senator Porter, a Radical, called the caucus to order, and presented Senator Denniston of the same faction, as chairman. The motion being made to proceed to the nomination of two United States Senators, Senator J. C. Wright, a Hunker, moved an amendment that three should be nominated, viz., one to fill out Silas Wright's unexpired term, four years; one to fill out Senator Tallmadge's unexpired term, about six weeks; and one to succeed Senator Tallmadge for the ensuing six years. This precipitated a hot fight. Charges of 'snap caucus,' 'unconstitutionality,' and 'trickery' were hurled back and forth. Eventually, the amendment was put, and carried by 47 votes to 46. The caucus then nominated John A. Dix, Radical, for the four-year term, he receiving 51 votes to 41 for Judge Samuel Nelson, Hunker.²¹ They next nominated Senator Dickinson, Hunker, to fill out the unexpired six weeks term, he receiving 66 votes to 13 for Michael Hoffman, and 14 scattering. The Radicals then tried to force an adjournment, and, amid scenes of turbulence and parliamentary filibustering, the meeting was nearly broken up.²² The chairman, although a Radical, overruled his associates' dilatory motions and, after every resource was exhausted, Dickinson was nominated for the six-year term also, receiving 54 votes to 19 for Hoffman, and the rest scattering or

¹⁹ *Van Buren Mss.*, LII, 12146-47.
The italics are ours.

²⁰ That is, the Radicals were not strong enough to nominate two.

²¹ See Appendix I.

²² *Argus*, Jan. 20, 1845.

silent. The customary motion to make the nomination unanimous was lost by the objection of Senator Johnson, who hotly declared that the nomination had been procured by unfair and undemocratic tactics. It was asserted that 38 members refused to vote on this motion, but probably a number had gone home. A few days later, in the legislature, the nominations were ratified by election; and, the heat of discussion having abated somewhat, every Democrat, even Johnson, supported both nominees. During the discussion over the matter, it is significant that some Radical papers, such as the New York *Evening Post* and the Mohawk *Courier*, expressed the opinion that the action of "King Caucus" was not binding in this case, and this was denounced by the *Argus*, as "factionous and dangerous."²³ It was rumored at the time that some of the Radicals were in favor of uniting with the Whigs, who proposed to help them send Samuel Young to the Senate; but this move, if it actually started, was promptly quashed, either through Governor Wright's intervention or, as Hammond says, by Colonel Young himself.²⁴ The spirit of faction was not yet so bold.

When the election of state officers came up, even more striking evidences of division appeared. Successors were to be chosen to five Radicals, three of whom were Flagg, Young, and John Van Buren. The Hunkers demanded half of these offices, but presented no candidate against Flagg, on account of his great record. They came within one vote of defeating Van Buren, and did capture the three other nominations, including that for Secretary of State, which Young lost by two votes. It was believed that their course was dictated by a desire to be revenged for the active campaign the state officers had made against Seymour a few weeks earlier. It is probable that they had a more practical object than that; namely, to get control of the Canal Commission, which consisted of these five officers and the Lieutenant-Governor. A study of the provisions of the Seymour law, passed the year before, will show that the execution of them, and consequently the whole canal policy of the state, depended upon the personnel of that Commission.

When the legislature came to take up the work of legislation,

²³ *Argus*, with quotations; Jan. 25, 1845.

²⁴ Hammond, III, 530.

the canal question, so prominently treated by Governor Wright, naturally received much attention. The policy of the Hunkers prevailed, and, in accordance with the views of Speaker Seymour, a bill passed both houses—by the willing support of the Whigs—carrying an appropriation of \$197,000 for the extension of canal work, and making only partial provision for the redemption of the principal part of its debt. In view of the Governor's previously expressed views on retrenchment and safety, it should not have been a surprise when, on the same day, he returned this bill with his veto, justified in a long message evidently prepared beforehand,²⁵ amplifying his previous arguments. The Hunkers, however, were enraged, and charged that five Radical senators had stayed away from the final vote so that the bill might pass and give Governor Wright a chance to veto it and thus show himself to be a Radical.

Coincident with this was the consideration of six proposed constitutional amendments—the first and second of which would take from the legislature the power to increase the state debt and require an affirmative popular vote before appropriating any money for public works not immediately of a revenue-producing nature. The motive underlying these amendments was, as Hoffman had tersely put it, “not distrust of the people, but distrust of the legislature.” As far back as 1842, that leader had written that if the legislature persisted in voting money for public works without making exact provision for its repayment, he would go for a constitutional convention.²⁶ This now appeared to be inevitable, the only alternative being for the legislature to submit, and the people to approve, individual amendments settling the controverted points. To this course there were serious obstacles. First, the issue that had brought on the “People's Resolution” was still far from being overwhelmingly decided in favor of either side; and, second, there were many other articles in the Constitution of 1821 that were being severely and widely criticised. Among these were the judiciary clause and the one on qualifications of electors. It was generally felt that the time was ripe for a thorough revision of the instrument of government by a body specially chosen for that purpose.

Taking advantage of this sentiment, John Young, the shrewd leader of the Whigs in the lower house, introduced there a bill

²⁵ Hammond, III, 556.

²⁶ Also, see above, 44.

providing for a constitutional convention in the summer of 1846. At the same time, he marshalled his party associates to oppose the ratification of the two amendments that Governor Wright had recommended with such confidence. This solid vote of the Whigs, added to that of the conservative Democrats, speedily killed the amendments, and served the double purpose of widening the breach in the ranks of the majority and making the convention inevitable. Young next turned to the Radical Democrats; and, by their help, he put through both houses, against the strongest opposition that Seymour and the other Hunker leaders could furnish, a bill for the convention introduced by Mr. Crain, Radical. The Hunkers generally disbelieved in a convention, holding that the proper remedy for constitutional defects was through action of the legislature, which indeed was the only course authorized by the Constitution then in force.²⁷ Moreover, they declared that, if a convention were to be called, it ought first to be after a majority vote of the people, and second, that all amendments it might propose should be voted on separately. They fought hard to amend the convention bill along those lines, but failed; and so, on its passage, every vote cast against it—33 in the Assembly and 14 in the Senate—was cast by a Hunker.²⁸

Governor Wright perceived that the situation had drifted into an impasse, from which there was no likely escape except by the decision of the people; so he approved Crain's bill, and the people approved it in the ensuing November. It is quite possible that the Governor did not appreciate at the time the result that later appeared so clearly. It was inevitable that the success of Young's tactics for a convention would make him a most prominent figure in the public eye, demonstrating his ability as a political tactician by the same process that revealed the discord in his opponents' ranks. Nevertheless, both factions to this discord felt justified by the course of events in the policy they pursued, and of course it is possible to argue that either course might have succeeded equally, had public sentiment been united.

When the legislative session of 1845 at length drew near its close and the question arose as to the nature of the address to be issued in accordance with long-established party custom, it was

²⁷ Lincoln, II, 210.

²⁸ Hammond, III, 544, 554.

found that the clever strategy of the Whigs, coupled with the unprecedented series of defeats to party measures, had so widened the cleavage in the party ranks that it was impossible to unite on an address to the people. Each side blamed the other for this failure; and each charged, with perfect truth, that the other had made common cause with the enemy on important measures.

Scarcely had the legislature adjourned when the Radical members issued an address to the people, summing up the situation as they saw it, and especially justifying their action in supporting the bill for a convention. They maintained that the party policy on public works had been settled by the law of 1842 and should be rigidly adhered to, under every consideration of common honesty and public safety. They denounced the attempts made by the Hunkers to amend the convention bill, as showing distrust of popular rule. The address was signed by forty-three members, and its publication aroused further recrimination, and added another brand to the fire of discord.

The election of delegates in the spring of 1846 to the Constitutional Convention was conducted not along party lines, but rather to secure men of fitness for the approaching task. The same spirit, fortunately, was present in the organization and deliberations of the Convention. Men prominent in both the Democratic factions were conspicuous in the Convention, as ex-Governor Bouck and Samuel Nelson of the Hunkers, and Michael Hoffman and Churchill C. Cambreleng of the Radicals. As a whole, the latter element had somewhat more influence there, owing, probably, to the fact that they had earlier been consistent advocates of a convention. To Hoffman was given the honor of drafting the very important financial section of the new constitution, and naturally he incorporated therein, in no uncertain terms, the provisos and prohibitions attached to the "People's Resolution." The strength of his work was tested and triumphantly sustained, a few years later.²⁹

The elections in the fall of 1845 resulted in a Democratic gain of six members in the lower house and a loss of three in the upper. The Radicals gained considerably on their rivals, sending Colonel Young to the Senate from the fourth district, and getting a large

²⁹ In May, 1852, when the Court of Appeals held the Whig law authorizing the loan of nine million dollars for

canals to be unconstitutional. Alexander, II, 163.

majority of the Democratic assemblymen, thereby being able to elect Mr. Crain speaker at last. The party dissensions, Hammond thought, were still disregarded by "the mass of Democratic voters, who were little disposed to take either side."³⁰ But this did not hold true in Oneida and Otsego counties, where the regular tickets were beaten, through disaffection. These counties were seats of long-standing resentment against the recent financial policy of the Democratic administrations, both state and national. It was hinted that the politicians of Oneida were more concerned for their own interests than for the party's claims of popular service. Said the Jefferson County *Democrat*, a Radical paper of Watertown, enraged over the loss of a senator in the Jefferson-Lewis-Oneida district:

There now remains little doubt of a Whig majority in this district of 200 to 500. . . . Oneida, conservative, bargaining, self-seeking Oneida has, under the influence of the corrupt clique which control that county, gone over to the enemy.³¹

It is interesting to note that at this time the extreme Radicals began to try to transfer some of the opprobrium attaching to the name of the old Albany Regency, to Croswell and his friends among the new state officers. Thus, the *New York News* said:

In connexion with the central bank power at Albany, the "Oneida Clique," more generally known as the Albany Regency, ruled the state for years. Their control was complete and effectual. No appointment was made contrary to their wishes—no bank chartered, in the profit of which they did not share—no measure of internal improvement passed until their interest had been consulted in the arrangement of its route . . . the ascendancy of Conservatism, staggered in 1837, was finally and, we trust, forever overthrown by the election of Silas Wright as governor.³²

But the *News'* trust in the power of the Governor and his friends was not to be justified.

Two contests between the factions marked the legislative session of 1846. One of these shows the beginning of their adher-

³⁰ Hammond, III, 556.

³¹ *Jefferson County Democrat*, Nov. 13, 1845.

³² Quoted in *Jefferson County Democrat*, *ut supra*.

ence to different national principles, while the other illustrates the rivalry growing out of personal quarrels. This legislature assembled at a time of keen excitement growing out of the tense situations in Texas and in Oregon with the anxiety arising out of the possibility of war.

Scarcely was the Senate called to order when the first contest occurred. Senator Jones, a Hunker, offered a set of resolutions approving all the policies of the National Administration, including the annexation of Texas. His object in doing this was believed to be to strengthen the hands of the Hunkers by making Marcy and Dickinson, their representatives at Washington, the peculiar friends of the President. Senator Porter, Radical, promptly moved amendatory resolutions omitting all reference to Texas. This led to a prolonged and warm debate, not upon the merits of the Texas question, but upon the loyalty and justification of the public course of the leading men of the two factions, particularly Colonel—now Senator—Samuel Young. Aside from Colonel Young, who replied to his assailants with a freedom of expression and fiery invective of which he was a master, the special object of the Hunker attacks was Preston King, the congressman from St. Lawrence, who had broken away from the Administration on the Texas question. As King was known to stand close to Governor Wright, the exposure of his 'errors' was valued by Wright's opponents as a blow at the Governor. "The debate," says Alexander, "indicated that the Free-Soil sentiment had not only taken root among the Radicals, but that rivalries between the two factions rested on differences of principle far deeper than canal improvement."⁸³

The other contest arose out of an attempt to remove Croswell as state printer. Ever since his notable contest with Van Dyck, in 1843, Croswell had been the particular aversion of the Radicals. The latter believed they had at length attained the strength and enough support of public opinion to venture upon his removal. It was charged that his terms for doing the state's work were exorbitant, and a bill was introduced directing the Senate Committee on Finance to ascertain what the proper cost of such documents should be, and to let the work henceforth to the lowest bidder. At the same time, a bill was brought into the Assembly naming William

⁸³ Alexander, II, 102.

Cassidy, of the *Atlas*, as state printer. To forestall defeat, Croswell now induced his friends to amend the Senate bill so as to abolish the office of state printer; and, despite the futile rage of the Radicals, who well understood that it was not economy but desire to save his prestige that lay back of Croswell's self-sacrificing attitude, the bill passed; and, after it became a law, Croswell bid to print the state notices absolutely free, and of course won.

CHAPTER VIII

THE OVERTHROW OF SILAS WRIGHT

THE rapid progress of the Mexican War, with its inevitable making and unmaking of official reputations, marked the summer of 1846. In addition, the bickering over public policies, the adoption of a new tariff, the sitting of the closely-watched Constitutional Convention, and the regular biennial campaign for governor and congressmen, made this summer one of the most exciting, politically, in the history of the state. The main issue was the reelection of Governor Wright, which was foreseen, long before the election, to present a difficult problem. The Governor's friends were divided upon the advisability of his becoming a candidate for reelection. Said Nathaniel Benton, "After the development of the difficulties in the Democratic party in the state, and they had sufficiently shown themselves prior to the election of 1844, to satisfy any considerate man that a disruption was at hand, which must soon overwhelm any man occupying the executive chair, I objected to and advised against his acceptance of the office. . . . Mr. Wright had other friends who did not hesitate to express their opinions on the subject."¹ But the greater number of the Governor's intimates professed to expect an easy victory, and, whether they really did so or not, were indignant at suggestions of his withdrawal in the face of factional opposition. The Governor took the same view, and presented himself to the state convention for a second time. He was renominated by a vote of 112 to 14,² despite the repeated and strenuous warnings of Hunker papers like the *Utica Observer*, *New York Globe*, and *Norwich Journal*³ that he was not the proper man—warning which the *Whig Democrat Journal* of Kingston later⁴ recalled with grim satisfaction as "surely

¹ Benton, 276.

² The 14 were divided as follows: 2 from Allegany, 2 from New York, 2 from Saratoga, 4 from Oneida, 1 each from Broome, Cattaraugus, Warren, and

Wyoming counties. Crocker of Oneida objected to making it unanimous. *Atlas*, Oct. 10, 1846.

³ See Appendix II.

⁴ Nov. 8, 1846.

not treacherous . . . a timely and a friendly warning." The convention was called on to decide contests from Albany and Oneida counties,⁵ and, in the former, seated the *Atlas* delegates—including William Cassidy and Peter Cagger—by 77 votes to 44. Lieutenant-Governor Gardiner was cordially renominated.

The convention then adjourned to present its work to the people; and, in this task, it found serious obstacles to encounter. The summoning of the Constitutional Convention had, indeed, relieved the party of much of the burden incident to the decision of the state's financial policy, but there was suppressed resentment at the Governor's endorsement of the "Whig manoeuvre" that led to that convention; and the policy adopted there was doubtless foreseen and opposed by those who implicated him in it. Again, there was an uncomfortable feeling that the partisans of the Polk administration were more than indifferent to Governor Wright's success, since that would be interpreted as a vindication of that leader's views and a tribute to his personality, making him a conspicuous candidate the following presidential election. Other causes of friction that seemed likely to militate against the Governor were unpopular nominations for minor offices, his stern handling of the anti-rent disturbances, and his upholding of the much-criticised Canal Board.

Under these dubious circumstances, the fight was waged against the united and militant Whigs, who, as had been anticipated, chose for their standard-bearer the resourceful John Young, who was almost in a position to make his own issues. The actual campaign was short⁶ and rather lifeless, at least on the Democratic side. There was much interest manifested in the result; and many observers discovered, some little time before election day, that Wright's success was doubtful. Marcy wrote to his brother-in-law, Newell, on September 27th, "Tallmadge said . . . that the Whig ascendancy would be sustained in New York; it is quite evident they mean to make a vigorous effort, but, if they are met by a like vigorous effort on the part of the Democrats all will be well."⁷ Newell assured him in reply that all was well;⁸ evidently Newell was a poor observer. Wright himself was less sanguine. As two

⁵ In those two counties, and also in Madison, a fusion was effected later, by dividing the candidates for assembly and county offices. *Atlas*, Oct. 16, 1846.

⁶ Wright was renominated on Oct. 1st.

⁷ *Marcy Mss.*, XII, 34803.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 34812.

years earlier, in a speech at Malone,⁹ he had hinted at elements that would threaten his reelection, now he thought he saw those elements at work. On October 14th, he wrote to Van Buren, "From all I can see, I incline to think that the leading conservatives are determined to make what opposition they can. I infer this from the fact that they all predict defeat, and that the first-class leaders are professing friendship, but constantly fault-finding, while the second-class are open mouthed in opposition."¹⁰ Hoffman reached the same conclusion.¹¹ Wright thought there would be a chance if the Anti-Rent vote could be divided; but he would not compromise his principles to do so,¹² and therefore failed.

The election bore out the worst fears of the Democrats. Young defeated Wright by 11,572, while Gardiner, endorsed by the Anti-Renters, won by 13,357.¹³ Wright's vote for governor fell off nearly 54,000 from that of two years before, and was even less by many thousands, than the Democratic vote cast for the same office in 1842 or in 1840. The total vote for governor was 100,900 less than in 1844, which led some critics to conclude that "amidst this mass of intrigue, there was no great principle at stake."¹⁴

The Democratic majority was reduced in the Senate and wiped out in the Assembly, while the Whigs elected 23 congressmen out of 34, thus helping them to get control of the national House of Representatives. The new constitution was overwhelmingly carried, so everybody received some consolation.

Governor Wright's defeat plunged the party as a whole into despondency; and indeed, to one viewing only his splendid career and unquestioned ability, the great obligations under which he had placed his party by his unselfishness in 1844, and the prestige that would naturally follow a party waging a victorious war, it would have seemed incomprehensible that such a leader, under such circumstances, could have suffered such a fatal overthrow. The explanation is to be found in the combination of discordant events that we have just been considering.

⁹ Gillet, *Life and Times of Silas Wright*, II, 1592; see Alexander, II, 82, 121.

¹⁰ *Van Buren Mss.*, LIII, 2482-83.

¹¹ *Flagg Mss.*, Hoffman Letters. Letter of Nov. 1, 1846.

¹² He refused to promise pardon to their convicted members; Young did so.

¹³ *Civil List*, 166.

¹⁴ *Democratic Review*, Dec., 1846.

What were Wright's own views as to the importance and causes of his overthrow? The result itself was not a surprise to him; for, a few days after the election, he wrote to Van Buren, "I can say to you with perfect truth [I feel] no shock of disappointment."¹⁵ He regretted the disaster to the party more than his own elimination from public life, and expressed an eager desire to work in the ranks for the restoration to power of the organization that had so signally honored him.¹⁶ The decisive cause of his defeat, he thought, was the opposition of the "Conservatives," i.e., the Hunkers, which he had been led to expect from the course followed by the *Argus* and the *Utica Observer*, their leading organs.

His friends and followers took largely the same view, but added local causes and opposition of the "Federal crowd." Cambreleng wrote to Van Buren, "He [Wright] had everything to contend with—first, Polk, Marcy, Cass & Co., and their treacherous crew; second, Anti-Renters; third, the license law; and fourth, generally the most unpopular and worthless nominations on our part . . . the New York custom house, through its penitentiary nominations reduced Wright's plurality over Young 5000 in that city . . . we reduced our majority in this county [Suffolk] at least 400 votes by two very bad nominations."¹⁷ Tilden, in his report to the Utica convention of two years later, charged that the "disastrous defeat" of 1846 was due to the Hunkers.¹⁸

Not agreeing with these conclusions, Marcy, who was suspected of being secretly well pleased with the result, wrote to his friend Wetmore:

This is a sad result. One that I feared, but yet hoped otherwise. . . . Within my memory we never had a more disastrous overthrow in New York. . . . A long train of events has led to the result, and he had very little discernment who did not see troubles ahead. I take consolation, perhaps I might say credit, to myself for having at an early date, when the thing was practicable, done all I could to avert the threatened catastrophe—but it has been *permitted* to come upon us and those who suffer are most to blame for what has happened—a presumptuous Phaethon has undertaken to drive the horses of the sun.

Now we are to have a season, I presume, of crimination and recrimina-

¹⁵ *Van Buren Mss.*, LIII, 12490.

¹⁶ Letter to Judge Fine, Nov. 8, 1846; quoted in Hammond, III, 757.

¹⁷ *Van Buren Mss.*, LIII, 12495-96.

Letter of Nov. 30, 1846.

¹⁸ Tilden, Samuel J., *Public Writings and Speeches*, I, 234.

tion—and there is danger that existing animosities will thereby become still more inveterate. Would each party . . . become sensible of its own errors . . . we should soon rise from our fall.¹⁹

Marcy's expectation was fulfilled by a flood of conflicting 'explanations' that only aggravated the condition they were intended to explain. Chief among these explanations was a remarkable series of articles that appeared in the *Atlas*, the Radical organ, during the month of December, 1846, and was reprinted in pamphlet form for general distribution. It was later asserted that the author of these articles was no other than Governor Wright himself; and indeed, in the systematic method of their presentation, its reënforcement with figures, and the exhaustive nature of its argument, there is much to remind one of Wright's best efforts.

The *Atlas* articles²⁰ take up in succession the various causes contributing to the result, beginning with Anti-Rentism shrewdly seized upon by the Whigs to help them locally, proceeding through discontent with the canal and bank policies, and concluding with the opposition of the *Argus* and its friends, whom the author identifies with the Conservatives. Among these are named Senators Chamberlain of Allegany, J. C. Wright of Schoharie, Scovil of Lewis, Mitchell of Montgomery, and Clark of Washington counties. Chamberlain represented a county which Governor Wright had been fearful of two years before,²¹ and where his veto of the canal bill had been particularly obnoxious. J. C. Wright and Clark will be remembered as Samuel Young's assailants in the legislature. There were, said the *Atlas*, strong conservative organizations in Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Chenango counties, where there was a Democratic loss of 4168 votes in two years. Saratoga county was also conservative; and there had been bolting by prominent individuals in Herkimer, Chemung, and Steuben. Thus it was demonstrable that *the* blame for the reverse rested upon the Hunkers.

The irritation produced by these articles was great; and, to fan the flames, their publication was almost insisted upon by the Radicals. Party papers that refused to print them were denounced as

¹⁹ *Marcy Mss.*, XII, 34859-60. Letters of Nov. 5, and 7, 1846.

²⁰ *Causes and Consequences*, *passim*.

²¹ He wrote to Van Buren that he

"anticipated a breeze in Allegheny Co.," but would answer inquirers that he stood upon the Act of '42. *Van Buren Mss.*

in sympathy with the authors of the defeat. In Buffalo, the *Courier*, the highly-respected organ of the party, declined them as requiring too much space and productive of too little good. The chairman of the Erie County Central Committee urged the paper to consent; and, upon its continued refusal, a new paper was started which did print them. Like action was threatened elsewhere. On the other hand, many "presses" were glad to publish them.²² By such proceedings, the factional feud, hitherto largely confined to Albany and Oneida counties, rapidly spread throughout the state.

To counteract the Radical charges, the Hunkers brought forward their own explanations. Most of them attributed the disaster solely to the power of the Anti-Rent vote; others alleged the unpopularity and unwisdom of some of the Governor's appointments; all united in denying with great show of indignation the charge of treachery to the state ticket on the part of the Conservative friends of the National Administration. Evidence was adduced to show that in Erie County and other sections where the local organizations were in the hands of the element supposed to be hostile to the Governor, the party had done nearly as well as in 1844, while in sections which his friends had controlled the showing was disappointing. "We have yet to see," said a correspondent of the *Argus*, "that those who boasted that they were the special friends of Gov. Wright did any effective work in his behalf; we know on the contrary, that in this vicinity the men who disapprove of some of his most notable official acts bent every effort to loyally support him."²³ From this it was but a step to charging that the Radical element itself was most responsible for Governor Wright's defeat. And, finally, it was boldly asserted that, far from Wright having pulled the national ticket through to victory in 1844, he had in fact been saved by that ticket from his own defeat, but that he could not justly presume on such salvation a second time. Letters sent from Washington to the federal office-holders in New York just before election were cited to prove the good faith of the Administration.²⁴

²² The *Atlas* names the following: Jefferson Co. *Democrat*, St. Lawrence *Republican*, Ontario *Messenger*, Cayuga *Tocsin*, Troy *Budget*, N. Y. *Evening Post*, Ulster *American*, Mohawk *Courier*, Utica *Democrat*, Niagara *Cataract*, and

the Wayne *Sentinel*, which said "We believe and know for the most part that its statements are true."

²³ *Argus*, Feb. 4, 1847.

²⁴ Stanwood, 229. But see in refutation, Hammond, III, 696.

The weight of evidence seems to sustain the contention of the Radicals that their factional opponents were willing to see Wright sacrificed, and that to that end they deliberately 'cut him' while supporting the rest of the ticket. An instance of this, so striking that it evoked special comment from a Whig paper,²⁵ is shown in the vote of the town of Western, Oneida County. The result there was in part as follows:

For	Whig Vote	"Loco" (Democratic)
Governor	266	37
Senator	64	271
Congress	29	306
Sheriff	70	266

from which it appears that more than six-sevenths of the Democratic voters in that town cut Wright's name! While this was an extreme case, it differed only in degree from many others,²⁶ which, taken together, caused the heaviest suspicion to rest upon the Hunkers. The falling off from the vote of 1844 was too great to be otherwise accounted for, and the many irritating episodes of his eventful term furnished ample predisposition to such action by Wright's opponents. President Polk himself seems to have believed it, for he wrote in his diary: "The Hunkers seem to have been guilty of disloyalty to Mr. Wright; henceforth, that faction shall receive no official countenance from me, if I can help it."²⁷ If Polk needed any confirmation of his suspicions, such was not long wanting; for, during the succeeding session of Congress, he was told plainly that the feeling of New York Democrats was that Cabinet intrigues were to be blamed largely for the recent disaster. In the papers of Congressman Kemble, there is recorded a "note of a conversation" with the President, dated Jan. 9th, 1847, in which the topic is discussed as follows:

. . . the vote upon the tea and coffee duties was not given in conformity with the real opinion of the northern Democrats, but to show their want of confidence in the Secretary of the Treasury,²⁸ who had recommended it, and who had lost the good opinion of the northern

²⁵ *Utica Daily Gazette*, Nov. 5, 1846.

²⁶ See the total result for Oneida Co., above, p. 65. Also, in Fulton, Schoharie Co., the home town of Wright's predecessor and opponent, ex-Governor Bouck,

a Democratic majority of 144 in the spring was changed to a Whig-Anti-Rent majority of 38 in the fall.

²⁷ *Polk's Diary*, entry for Nov. 5, 1846.

²⁸ Robert J. Walker of Mississippi.

democracy. . . . He [Polk] said it was the first information he had received of such a feeling existing, and that he could not account for it. I told him that the democrats of New York attributed the loss of Governor Wright's election to Walker. He said that no man had been more desirous of seeing Mr. Wright re-elected than himself, that he considered himself allied to the real democracy of the country, and that he had always been opposed to Mr. Foster and his clique; that this subject had been discussed in a cabinet meeting, and that every member of the cabinet knew his opinions. I told him that I did not doubt them, but the fact was, that nine-tenths of all the postmasters, and two-thirds of all the government officials had been opposed to Mr. Wright at the last election, that²⁹ the most of them had been selected from that very clique to which he had alluded, and that others had followed as a matter of course. He said that Mr. Johnson was a true friend of Gov. Wright. I told him I believed that, and [that] both himself and Mr. Johnson had been deceived—but such were the facts. He said that a postmaster from Montgomery county had been removed because of his hostility to Mr. Wright. I answered that it would require a great many removals to convince the democratic party in New York. He then alluded to the appointment of Gov. Bouck.³⁰ I told him that it was an unfortunate one. He said he was now convinced that it was so. . . . Mr. Buchanan and Mr. Walker came in, and our conversation was changed.³¹

As further evidence of the President's desire at this time to be at least impartial as between the New York factions, we have his statement to Mr. Kemble, just a few days later³² than the preceding:

He also authorized me to say to the friends of Mr. Wright that he would make no nomination to office in the state of New York without consultation with Mr. Dix.³³

At the same time, Polk "complained of Rathbun and Preston King; the first had never come near him—the second had given him no opportunity to converse with him; Mr. Dix could not understand their course."³³

Yet another widely operating cause for the overthrow was the general decline of party discipline and loyalty at this time, in which the Radicals, as well as their opponents, shared. The Ulster

²⁹ I. e., because.

³⁰ To the position of Receiver of Public Money, in New York City.

³¹ Mss. in possession of Gouverneur Kemble, Esq.

³² Monday morning, Jan. 11, 1847.

³³ Mss. in possession of Gouverneur Kemble, Esq.

Republican, one of the papers which printed the *Atlas* articles, declared editorially:

It cannot be denied that the landmarks of party have been entirely lost sight of in the county and congressional nominations—that there was a complete dissolution of the political elements, and that in almost every county in the state prominent Democrats of both sections of the party have disregarded the great principle of union. . . . Where the “Hunkers” had the ascendancy in the nominating convention, the opposite section of the party cast their votes against the candidates, and where the “Barnburners” had the control, the opposite faction turned against the whole ticket.³⁴

A notable instance of a Hunker bolt of this character occurred in Herkimer county—“ironclad Herkimer,” as Hoffman used to call it. James M. Gray obtained the Democratic nomination for sheriff by a small majority, after a hot contest, and in the congressional convention for the Herkimer-Montgomery district, Abraham Van Alstyne was nominated by the casting vote of a member whose object, his enemies said, “was to present the man who could be most easily defeated at the polls.”³⁵ Both candidates were Radicals, so the Hunkers bolted, and, combining with the Whigs, elected William I. Skinner as sheriff, and General George Petrie as congressman.³⁶ On the other hand, in Jefferson county, Orville Hungerford, who had played a prominent part in the retiring congress, was a candidate for reëlection, and received the nomination by 6 majority over a Radical, Lysander H. Brown. Thereupon, enough Radicals supported Joseph Mullen, the Whig candidate, to secure his election by 44 majority.³⁷ These facts supplied both sides with plenty of ammunition for the ‘crimination and recrimination,’ which Marcy had expected.

The efforts of conciliatory politicians to suppress the fruitless discussion proved unavailing, and it waged with unabated fury during the spring and summer of 1847. Wright himself took no part in it beyond the share he may have given to the preparation of the *Atlas* articles. He retired to the seclusion of his backwoods

³⁴ *Ulster Republican* (of Kingston), in *Papers read before the Herkimer County Historical Society*, II, 420 ff. Nov. 11, 1846.

³⁵ Benton, 277.

³⁷ *George W. Smith Mss.*

³⁶ See “Address by Hon. Robert Earl,”

home, and from there wrote with his usual good nature and methodical attention to detail of his difficulties in resuming the long-interrupted routine of his rural duties, and of the characteristic happenings of country life. This quiet alteration of his previous busy career may have produced depression and physical degeneration all unsuspected. At any rate, the statesman's rest was rudely interrupted by the sudden stroke of a grave malady, and on the morning of August 28, 1847, the community and the whole state were shocked to hear that Silas Wright was dead. While his plain townsmen were paying him the last honors of a simple funeral, messages of sympathy and regret poured in from every corner of the Union, testifying to the remarkable hold he had upon public esteem.³⁸ His death, however, did not assuage the turmoil started by the circumstances of his defeat. His followers declared that his pride had been wounded, and his heart broken by the treachery of those who owed him so much, and from that time on they spoke constantly of his assassins. In the state convention at Utica, the following month, a speaker remarked the necessity of doing justice to Wright's memory. To this a Hunker delegate slightly answered, "It is too late to talk of doing justice to Mr. Wright; he is dead"; whereupon, James S. Wadsworth of Genesee, springing upon a table, replied in tones that made the ceiling ring, "It may be too late to do justice to Mr. Wright; but it is not too late to do justice to his murderers!"³⁹

³⁸ Irving Bacheller's novel *The Light in the Clearing* presents the traditionally well-established picture of Wright's per-

sonality in a pleasing way.

³⁹ Stanton, 159.

CHAPTER IX

THE RADICALS AND FREE SOIL

IT was during the years 1846-47 that the Radical movement came to be closely connected with another movement, which was to furnish it with an issue that would soon raise it to the dignity of a distinct party and increase its importance in American political history far beyond what it otherwise would have attained. The Wilmot Proviso, first introduced into Congress in August, 1846, and again brought up and persistently pressed at the following winter session, afforded a practical test of every man's position on the vital subject of the extension of slavery into the territories. A "cloud no bigger than a man's hand" was gathering on the horizon, and serious thinkers already perceived in it the rising of a mighty storm. To its opponents, Wilmot's amendment was an odious irritant to tender sensibilities, a useless, because unconstitutional, attempt to upset the compromises upon which the government was founded, and a wedge that would split the Democratic party and thus destroy the most unifying institution in the country.

It was Congressman Preston King, who represented Wright's own district in Congress, who made the matter acute by introducing a bill appropriating \$2,000,000—later increased to \$3,000,000, whence the name "Three Million Bill"—under the conditions of the Wilmot Proviso. In his speech on the subject, he bluntly stated his purpose to "have the free principle of the Wilmot proviso enacted into law whether this bill passes or not. The time has come when this republic should declare by law that it will not be made an instrument to the extension of slavery on the continent of America."¹ He added: "False and recreant to his race and to his constituency would be any representative of free white men and women, who should by his vote place free white labor upon a condition of social equality with the labor of the black slave;

¹ Quoted in Hammond, III, 705 ff.

equally false would be he who, upon any pretense, should, by inaction and evasion of the question, produce the same degrading result." These bold words were a direct challenge to all Northern men to take sides upon the issue, and many resented King's stand.

The House of Representatives passed the Three Million Bill, with the Proviso, by 131 to 104, every Democrat from New York except one—Congressman Strong, who represented the Tioga-Chenango-Broome district—voting aye.² Congressmen King and Grover took part in the debate on the affirmative side, and Strong on the negative. In his speech, afterward explained in a letter to his constituents,³ Strong, after reaffirming his devotion to the cause of freedom, explained his position to be that the Proviso was an unnecessary and mischievous interference with the treaty-making power which the government was attempting to exercise in the face of a foreign war, and that its supporters thereby gave an impression of divided sentiment and so encouraged our national enemies. He had much to say of the similar though more reprehensible conduct of the "blue light Federalists" during the War of 1812. In short, he declared that national loyalty forbade the Proviso.

Then, turning to the action of his colleagues, Strong gave a searching examination of the "Secret Circular of 1844," in an effort to prove party disloyalty upon the pro-Wilmot men. This circular was a paper gotten up directly after the nomination of Polk by a few of the ardent Van Buren men in New York, and by them sent out very quietly to a select list of those who were supposed to sympathize with them.⁴ It regretted the nomination of Polk as imperilling the interests of the North, and questioned whether it would be best to support him. It finally expressed the conclusion that the best policy would be to support Polk, but, at the same time, to work for the nomination and election of congressmen who would oppose "the new and untenable doctrines"

² In the Senate, Dix voted for the Proviso, and Dickinson against it, a significant difference.

³ Reprinted in the *Argus*, March 13, 1847.

⁴ Those who signed it were George P. Barker, John W. Edmonds, Theodore

Sedgwick, William Cullen Bryant, D. D. Field, Thomas W. Tucker, and Isaac Townsend. Among those who received it were Flagg, Hoffman, King, Samuel Young, Addison Gardiner, John Tracy, Jabez D. Hammond, and Harmanus Bleeker.

of the annexation resolutions. To this course of action the men addressed were invited to subscribe and to unite in a circular to secure its execution. It appeared, however, that the response was not gratifying, and that the attempt was quietly dropped. When Strong's charges were made in the House of Representatives, Congressmen King and Grover promptly rose to disclaim any connection with the object of the circular, thus showing that the desire for party regularity was still paramount. Strong nevertheless pressed home his point, that the men who now advocated the Wilmot Proviso were, almost without exception, men who either shared in the authorship of the Secret Circular or had been the recipients of it. He undoubtedly foresaw, what a few months would make clear to all, that differences in principle would lead to different courses of action in party affairs.

The Secret Circular, which had been printed and promoted by the New York *Evening Post*, and had been noticed only by politicians before, now attained general notoriety; and efforts were made to cast odium upon its sponsors and, so far as possible, upon those to whom it was addressed. The Norwich *Journal*, published in Congressman Strong's home county, declared it to have been a "fraudulent movement, to procure the nomination and election of members of congress, who would defeat a prominent measure on which their election was based";⁵ and added, "the very steps they are now taking in relation to this Wilmot Proviso through *their* representatives in Congress are the same which have marked the victims of disappointed ambition in this state, for the last half century. No sooner do prominent Democratic politicians prepare for desertion than they commence by abusing the South."

But the mass of the Democrats of New York as represented by their legislators approved of the Proviso and, probably, of King's attitude. On motion of Samuel Young, strong resolutions approving King's stand were carried through the legislature.

Only three Democrats in the Senate, and nine in the Assembly, voted "no."⁶ The argument started there was carried throughout the state. In Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse, the matter came before the county conventions. In Buffalo, action favorable to

⁵ Quoted in the *Argus*, March 3, 1847. [] was Flanders, of Franklin, a Radical.

⁶ *Atlas*, Feb. 2, 1847. Among them

King was taken. In Rochester, the convention voted down the resolution commending him by a vote of 28 to 4. This led to an angry discussion as to the character of the meeting, the Radicals asserting that it was packed with office-holders and also remarking that only 32 delegates voted, out of 139.⁷ The Onondaga County convention in Syracuse resolved, on February 3d, that "the affairs of the general government have been conducted upon sound principles and to the entire satisfaction of the Democratic party, by our present able chief magistrate" [Polk]; and that "we deeply deplore the dissensions that exist among us in this state, which if fomented and encouraged, must inevitably lead to disastrous results. We therefore unhesitatingly and decidedly declare our opinion, that he is an enemy to his party and his country who encourages these dissensions, or in any wise serves to perpetuate the odious names and distinctions which corrupt politicians for selfish purposes have introduced among us."⁸ It has already been remarked that Onondaga County was one where the Hunkers controlled the organization.

It now came to be known that ex-President Van Buren held views favorable to the Wilmot Proviso. This revelation came through letters written by him to men whom he was in the habit of communicating with on party matters, such men as Flagg, Francis P. Blair, and others. When the news became known, it produced a general feeling of surprise. It was said that there was nothing in the ex-President's official conduct or public utterances that would lead to the supposition that he would support such a radical measure. His Northern critics, indeed, alleged that, during his presidential term, he had shown no disposition to thwart the will of the slave-holders. Hence, they argued, he must now have some motive other than devotion to principle. Could this be resentment against his successor in the party leadership, coupled perhaps with a desire to win back his old position in 1848?

Without seeking to minimize the possibility of Van Buren's entertaining resentment—for he certainly had reason to feel that—it is not necessary to suppose that this was the origin of his Free-Soil principles. Van Buren was a Northern man and withal a

⁷ *Argus*, Jan. 25, 1847; *Atlas*, Feb. 2, 1847.

⁸ *Argus*, Feb. 15, 1847.

man of wide travel and experience, including residence in slavery environment. He had been able to perceive the full effects of the "peculiar institution," and had had ample leisure to reflect upon it, and to devise a course of conduct. He perceived the political predominance of the Southern element. Wilmot was one of his party followers, and had connection with him through mutual friends. Thus, nothing would be more natural than to find Van Buren supporting the new policy.⁹ As for personal ambition, there is nothing to prove that Van Buren at any time seriously entertained hope of regaining his lost preëminence.¹⁰ He knew that for him the flight of time would only push farther and farther away the realization of the hope that had seemed so near in the winter of 1843-44. Moreover, he seems to have been honestly content with the calm of his retirement. Friendly correspondence with his intimate friends like Flagg, Paulding, and his whimsical banker, George F. Wood; the raising and sale of his fine stock and prize apples, and proximity to Albany, where he could watch with tolerant eye the heated contentions of younger men for the prizes that he had enjoyed so long—these were enough for him.

There is no doubt, however, that the prospect of enrolling the potent name of Van Buren upon their side appealed to the zealous Free-Soilers, to whom, as to all partisans of a novel cause, every sound convert was welcome, but an influential one especially so. The Free-Soilers now began to cultivate the Radicals; and the Radicals began to turn more and more to Free-Soil principles. The *Evening Post* had long had Free-Soil leanings. Now the *Atlas* began to publish strong anti-slavery editorials.¹¹ Preston King's success, and the endorsement given him by the legislature, encouraged others to take a bold stand. Most of the young men of the party saw in the Wilmot Proviso an issue worth joining and a chance to challenge the obvious domination of the South. They

⁹ Shepard, Edward M., *Martin Van Buren*, 358-359.

¹⁰ "I am not a candidate for the Presidency, nor for any other position, nor do I intend to be. My intention was expressed in a letter to the *Republican Farmer*, of Pennsylvania, . . . extensive-

ly copied." Letter to C. P. White, Nov. 29, 1847; *Van Buren Mss.*

¹¹ E.g., Feb. 3, 1847. The *Atlas*, by this time, was acquiring a state-wide circulation. It was stated in the *Buffalo Republic* of October 5th that there were regularly received at that time in Buffalo 39 copies of the *Atlas* to 13 of the *Argus*.

flocked to it with avidity. Others saw in it a practical antidote to political abolition, whose strength was becoming ominous. In such conditions, Van Buren's espousal of Free-Soil doctrines came with timely force, and greatly helped to amalgamate his Radical followers with the Free-Soilers.

On other issues, the Radicals were orthodox.¹² They avowed their support of the Tariff of 1846, which professed to place the tariff system upon a low-duty but revenue-producing basis; they would give no countenance to the encouragement of favored industries. They upheld the Independent Treasury, now quite solidly established as a government institution. This of course was Van Buren's peculiar contribution to the workings of the government. Above all, they insisted upon the continuance of the debt-paying policy in New York state, which now enjoyed the sanction of constitutional incorporation. Finally, they professed earnest support of the national administration in its prosecution of the war, and in its negotiations with England. Thus, the Radicals approached the campaign of 1847 with a well-defined body of principles, a firm belief that they were the true Democracy, as much cohesion as at any previous time, and even more eagerness to assert their power and to punish their foes.

¹² Letter of Flagg, Sept. 6, 1847; *Van Buren Mss.* Also, Address of the Barnburner members of the legislature, given in Tilden, II, 535 ff.

CHAPTER X

SECESSION OF THE RADICALS, NOW CALLED BARNBURNERS

DURING the winter and spring of 1847, the distracted Democracy of New York, learning no prudence from its late defeat, indulged in long newspaper controversies as to, first, who was responsible for Silas Wright's defeat; second, the debate in the legislature and in county conventions on the Young resolutions approving Preston King's stand on the Wilmot Proviso; third, the alleged disloyalty to the national administration of George Rathbun and other Radical congressmen; and fourth, the libel suit brought by Edwin Croswell against Cassidy and French, proprietors of the *Atlas*.

This notorious case was based on an article in the *Atlas* of June 24, 1846, which accused Croswell in the plainest terms of instigating "perjury and the subornation of perjury" in the conspiracy cases arising out of a Hunker-Radical fight at New Scotland, Albany County, the previous spring. Cassidy's counsel was the Attorney-General, John Van Buren; and he flayed Croswell in the invective of which he was a master. "The man is yet to be born," he said, "original or hardy enough to propose Edwin Croswell for the suffrages of the people in any capacity."¹ But Van Buren had an opponent worthy of his steel in Rufus W. Peckham. He said:

No one who heard the Attorney-General summing up could doubt the paternity of this libel. It was a stream from the same fountain that had flowed here. . . . "Mr. Croswell had stuck his arms into the treasury up to his arm-pits"! . . . Why, this gentleman not only stuck in his arms, but jumped into the treasury, body and soul!—and not only stuck there himself, but pulled down Silas Wright with him. Thousands of votes were lost to Mr. Wright from the fact that he was induced to certify to the extraordinary and extortionate demands which this patriotic

¹ *Atlas*, Feb. 9, 1847.

[?] counsel made upon the treasury for his official services in the anti-rent cases. . . . "Who ever heard the name of a Croswell suggested for an office?" The counsel supposed, no doubt, that it was hardly possible, certainly not proper, to think of a Croswell or of anybody else for an office, so long as there was a Van Buren in existence. They monopolized them all!²

This sensational case, which resulted eventually in a verdict of \$500 damages for Croswell, was a scandal to the Democracy of the state, and aided in alienating still further the hostile factions.

The convention held in the spring to choose judicial candidates was controlled by the Radicals, William C. Crain being chosen chairman. Their majority, however, was only 5; and this marked decline of their strength—they had held control, the previous fall, by over 30—encouraged their rivals to hope for success at the next fall convention. The Hunkers laid their plans carefully. Loyalty to the national administration was emphasized; and Strong's charges against the 'Wilmot men' were carefully fostered.

But the chief policy relied upon was an agitation for "new men"—that is, men who had not been actively connected with either faction³—as candidates for the state offices which, under the new constitution, were now for the first time to be filled by vote of the people. Lieutenant-Governor Gardiner had resigned, to enter the Court of Appeals, and his successor, therefore, was to be chosen now; but the great aim of the Hunkers was to get rid of Attorney-General John Van Buren and Comptroller Flagg, and thus to complete their success of 1845.⁴

Flagg was completing his twelfth year of service as State Comptroller, but he declined to retire in favor of a "new man." He was therefore attacked as being too selfish to sacrifice himself for party harmony, and thus as an offender against the very principle of "rotation in office" which he had so strongly invoked against Croswell in the state printership fight. He was denounced as "factious and intolerant,"⁵ and as having "in several instances advised minorities to bolt and establish separate organizations under a promise from him and others connected with him that they

² *Argus*, Feb. 15, 1847.

⁴ See above, p. 67.

³ McGuire, James K., ed., *Democratic Party of the State of New York*, I, 246. ⁵ *Utica Observer*, quoted in the *Argus*, Sept. 8, 1847.

should be sustained. He is an old offender against the peace and the usages of the Democratic party." Finally, Flagg's financial sense, always his pride, which had earned the respect of the highest party leaders for years before, and had given him such an unprecedented tenure of his office—even that was assailed. "The meeting, on July 5, 1847, of a convention at Chicago for promoting the lake and river navigation of the West, gave occasion to comment on the position occupied by Comptroller Flagg."⁶ Flagg had vigorously opposed the enlargement of the Erie Canal and the extension of the lateral canals. He had prophesied that canal receipts would never be any higher, yet they had doubled within three years. There is no doubt that the fighting Comptroller was losing popularity; and, overlooking his past services and unaware how many of his prophecies would yet be fulfilled, his enemies swarmed to the attack.

The Radicals, on their part, met the cry of "new men" with sarcastic ridicule, and denounced it as an insincere subterfuge of clever politicians. "There is no mistaking," they said, "the character of a movement in which we see, as in Saratoga county, a Conservative convention sending John Cramer as its 'new man' to Syracuse! or where we find, as in Jefferson county, the delegates are expected to go for Mr. Hungerford . . . fresh from a career of office closing in defeat,⁷ yet put forth as a 'new man'! . . . Is Mr. Hungerford, who voted against the tariff of 1846, more free from controversy in the Democratic ranks than his colleagues who voted for it? Is Mr. Sanford⁸ of New York unaffected . . . who, to say nothing of his course recently, voted almost alone against the approval of the Wilmot Proviso?"⁹

The cry for "new men" was nevertheless taken up by a considerable proportion of the Democratic press of the state, and doubtless represented to some degree a real longing for harmony to be obtained by shelving the old leaders. But the Radicals would do nothing to satisfy this longing; and the skilful management of their opponents quickly turned this to their own advantage. The New York *Globe* of September 2nd published a list of thirty-

⁶ *McGuire*, I, 246.

⁷ See above, p. 82.

⁸ He was one of the three Democratic

senators who voted against the Young resolution.

⁹ *Atlas*, editorial, Sept. 21, 1847.

six papers—to which the *Argus* added three others¹⁰—said to have declared for “new men.” The *Atlas* promptly challenged the accuracy of this list, alleging that some names were used without authority and that others represented papers which had been established since the last state convention, purposely to break up the Democratic organization; and it concluded:

The pretended “new men” intrigue, at which the same set of political gamblers are now playing, is a mere cover for the events of last fall!¹¹

The *Atlas*, however, was not successful in discrediting the “new men” movement.

The selection of delegates to the state convention was marked by unprecedented rancor. Scenes formerly confined to Albany county, culminating in violence and lawsuits, now occurred in other sections. The Hunkers adopted the policy, in the larger counties, of endeavoring to break the unit rule and to have the delegates elected by districts, hoping in this way to capture some districts. When overruled in such attempts, they would bolt, and send contesting delegations.¹²

Under circumstances of great excitement, the convention met in Syracuse on September 29th. Every county was represented except Rockland. Contesting delegates appeared from Erie, New York, Otsego, Albany, and Oneida counties. Of the remaining 53 counties, the Radicals controlled 20; the Hunkers, 27; and 6 were evenly divided.¹³ Each faction was allowed to appoint one teller. The battle over the contested seats led to a long debate of the sharpest character and to numerous motions and roll-calls. It was finally settled by admitting 2 contesting Hunkers from Erie, 7 from New York, and 1 from Otsego, and 2 contesting Radicals from Albany, and 1 from Oneida. This increased the convention to 136 members, instead of the customary 128, and gave the Hunkers control by 73 votes to 63.¹⁴

Scarcely had the convention got under way when David Dudley Field, of New York county, offered a series of resolutions com-

¹⁰ See Appendix II.

¹¹ *Atlas*, editorial, Sept. 4, 1847.

¹² This occurred in Buffalo, under the management of W. L. G. Smith, a Fed-

eral office-holder, and in seven districts in New York county.

¹³ See Appendix III.

¹⁴ Figures from the *Atlas*, Sept. 30, 1847.

mending the course of the majority of the state delegation in Congress in supporting the Wilmot Proviso, and lauding that measure as sound Democratic doctrine.¹⁵ The resolutions were ruled out of order, amid great excitement. In the heat of debate, all the pent-up reproaches of the previous five years, the personalities, the insinuations, were flung back and forth. The epithet "Barnburner" was now commonly applied. James R. Doolittle of Wyoming county said that

When he came here, he scarcely knew to which side he belonged. But he began to find his position distinctly. . . . If it was barnburnerism to stand up for the rights of free labor to the soil . . . he was a barnburner. . . . If it was barnburnerism to stand by a faithful public servant¹⁶ who had stood between the people and the rapacity of those who would thrust their hands into the public treasury—then he was a barnburner!¹⁷

Others branded the efforts of the Radicals as the last struggle of the Albany Regency to maintain itself in a position where it had become odious. Per contra, the Hunkers were attacked as an "Albany clique" who would "rule or ruin" in the state. Eventually, the majority decided against the Radicals, whose resolutions were laid on the table.¹⁸

The Hunker majority now proceeded to name a state ticket, substituting Hungerford, who was a bank president and had already been, as we have seen, a center of controversy, for Comptroller in place of Flagg.¹⁹ They then adopted a platform upholding the national administration, without any mention of the firebrand Proviso. Finally, they reorganized the State Committee on a new plan, and then adjourned; but many of the Barnburners had already left, alleging unfair treatment.

The Hunkers tried to disprove this allegation, and the *Argus* went so far as to say:

One of the most striking features of the convention was the leniency and forbearance manifested by the majority toward the minority.

¹⁵ James C. Smith had framed a similar resolution for the Western New York Radicals. John Hubbell, in *Publications of Buffalo Historical Society*, IV, 151.

¹⁶ I.e., Flagg.

¹⁷ Reported in *Argus*, Oct. 17, 1847.

¹⁸ Some of the Radicals, viz., Crain,

Cambreleng, and Grover, upheld this decision as technically correct. *Argus*, Oct. 6, 1847.

¹⁹ Even on this the Radicals divided, six, including Grover and Flanders, voting against Flagg, though not for Hungerford. *Argus*, Oct. 16, 1847.

But the Whig *Syracuse Journal*, which may be assumed to be less prejudiced, in reporting the convention, said:

The votes are close, disputed, and repeated several times. The Hunkers have the majority, and manage affairs in as taunting a manner as possible. They are more expert in management, but less powerful in debate [than the Barnburners].²⁰

To justify themselves, the seceders now called a mass convention to meet at Herkimer on October 26th. This move was distasteful to Martin Van Buren and Flag. On October 12th, Van Buren wrote that he considered it "likely to inure to the advantage of the conservatives only."²¹ Flag replied that he too was utterly opposed to the "action of these hotspurs from whose indiscretion we have suffered as much as from any other source."²² He blamed Beckwith of Herkimer,²³ among others.

An editorial, published in the *Franklin Gazette* after the election and written, doubtless, by Flanders, who was Franklin's delegate in the state convention, and on most matters acted with the Barnburners, but who did not join in the secession, analyzed their reasons for seceding and calling the mass convention, and severely condemned them. As to the admission of 136 delegates, that, he said,²⁴ was due to their own action, and they had remained in the convention four days after it; as to the rejection of the Wilmot Proviso, that Proviso was "a new proposal, which the Democratic state convention of Massachusetts had also rejected, and those of Maine, Michigan, and Connecticut had ignored." He concluded that the seceders' real motive was "a spirit of embittered hostility to the present democratic national administration." Others declared that "their proceedings . . . are assignable to the fact that Mr. Flag was not nominated."²⁵

In spite, however, of the lukewarmness of some of the leaders, the Herkimer meeting was a respectable and important assemblage.²⁶

²⁰ *Syracuse Journal*, Oct. 1, 1847.

²¹ *Van Buren Mss.*, LIV, 12619-20.

²² *Ibid.*, 12621.

²³ Abijah Beckwith, a farmer and former member of Assembly, an associate of Michael Hoffman. His autobiography, written after he was 80 years old, is in the *George W. Smith Mss.*

²⁴ Entire editorial reprinted in the *Argus*, Nov. 16, 1847.

²⁵ *Onondaga Democrat*, quoted in *Argus*, Nov. 12, 1847.

²⁶ Estimates of the attendance differ widely. The *Herkimer Democrat*, an unfriendly organ, put it at 262 who came by train, and 200 "citizens of Herkimer." Other estimates go as high as 3000.

It was the first official gathering of the Barnburners, and took on the character of an assemblage of the ex-President's friends. Its spirit was that of uncompromising determination to carry on the fight for the principles above stated. It was believed that the Radicals of the state now had something more to hold them together than mere dislike, however strong or well founded, of their opponents. In addition to the old issue of upholding the policy of economy and solvency within the state, the opportunity now presented itself of advocating a great moral issue in the nation, and of fighting to commit the party as a whole to its advocacy.

Cambreleng presided, and John Van Buren prepared the address.²⁷ This address states the occasion of the mass convention as follows:

We shall call your attention more particularly to two of the acts of the convention,²⁸ of which we complain, and to which we shall not submit. The first is its refusal to allow an expression to be made of the sentiments of the New York Democracy in regard to the proposed extension of slavery to lands now free; and the second, obviously connected with it . . . is the superseding of the present State Central Committee . . . and the recommendation of *each Congressional District* to send a delegate to the next Convention of the Republicans²⁹ of the Union, to nominate a candidate for President of the United States.

The two acts were then discussed fully, but it is noticeable that about seven times as much space is devoted to expounding the Barnburners' views on Free Soil as to the violent change in the party organization.

David Dudley Field reported the resolutions, which repeated the ideas and almost the words used by King in his speech in Congress, the previous January, particularly

that we believe in the dignity and the rights of free labor; that free white labor cannot thrive upon the same soil as slave labor; and that it would be neither right nor wise to devote new territories to the slave labor of a part of the States, to the exclusion of the free labor of all the States.³⁰

These sentiments were enthusiastically applauded; and, from the whole temper of the meeting and its proceedings, it was now

²⁷ Gardiner, O. C., *The Great Issue*, 50 ff.

²⁸ I. e., the Syracuse convention.

²⁹ I. e., Democrats. ³⁰ Gardiner, 56.

evident that the split in the New York Democracy was complete, and that the two elements hated and feared each other more than they hated and feared the common enemy, the Whigs. From this time forth, the Radicals were generally called Barnburners.

Their immediate efforts were confined to the defeat of the Syracuse ticket, whose nominees they attacked as enemies of the stop-and-pay policy of 1842, as opponents of the constitutional convention, as high-tariff men, and as opponents, the most of them, of Silas Wright's reelection.³¹ These appellations were vigorously disavowed by the Hunkers;³² but denials failed to convince the revengeful Barnburners, who looked upon any candidate favored by the *Argus* as little better than a Whig;³³ and consequently, having to choose between them and the Whigs—for the Herkimer convention had not named a ticket—thousands stayed at home or wrote names on the ballot. "The following was extensively voted throughout the state:

"For Comptroller Remember Silas Wright

"For Secretary of State Mountain Freedom

"For Attorney-General Rebuke Fraud"³⁴

The result was what might have been foreseen, the completion of the rout of 1846 by the defeat of the Syracuse ticket,³⁵ thus reducing the party from the proud eminence and great power it had occupied in 1843 to temporary impotence. Even the comptrollership, so long the scene of Flagg's triumphs, and the stronghold of Radical ideas, passed into the hands of a Whig, in the person of Millard Fillmore, the former unsuccessful competitor of Silas Wright.

³¹ *Buffalo Republic*, editorial, Oct. 6, 1847.

³² E. g., *Niagara Democrat*, in the case of Nathan Dayton, candidate for lieutenant-governor.

³³ The *Ontario Messenger* called Edwin Croswell and Thurlow Weed "a noble pair of brothers" and offered "\$10 reward for any number of the Albany *Argus*, during the last year, in which its

editor vindicates any important measure of Democratic State policy." Quoted in *Buffalo Republic*, Oct. 6, 1847.

³⁴ *Long Island Democrat*, Nov. 22, 1847.

³⁵ The vote stood: Fillmore, 174,756; Hungerford, 136,027. Flagg received votes in nearly every county. Original canvass, in the office of the Secretary of State, Albany.

CHAPTER XI

THE CAMPAIGN OF 1848

THE time was now at hand when the long struggle was to be transferred to a broader stage. Moved by the double desire to exercise predominating influence within the state and to help decide whether the Southern element should remain in control of the party, both the Barnburners and the Hunkers prepared to fight for exclusive recognition by the national gathering at Baltimore. The Hunkers, since their victory at the Syracuse convention the previous summer, had the important tactical advantage of being "regular"; and they took full advantage of this position. They created a new State Central Committee, with power to call future conventions; and this committee did call a convention, which met on January 26, 1848, and selected delegates, on the district system, to go to Baltimore.

The Herkimer Convention, meantime, had called another convention for February 22, 1848, to meet at Herkimer, to select national delegates. Later on, however, a caucus of Democratic members of the legislature, attended, it was said,¹ by men of both factions—for previously that had been the usual method of ordering conventions—called a convention to meet at Utica on February 16th, either to select delegates to go to Baltimore, or to determine how they should be selected. The Barnburners then abandoned their arrangements, and prepared to fight for delegates to the Utica convention. They did not need to, however, as the Hunkers persisted in their district plan.

The Utica convention of February 16, 1848, was composed entirely of Barnburners. Delegates were present from every county, except three—Cattaraugus, Franklin, and Sullivan. John Tracy, the former eminent president of the Constitutional Convention, and a man who enjoyed the high esteem of both Van Buren and Wright, was the presiding officer. Once more John Van Buren

¹ Gardiner, 74.

prepared the address,² this time of extreme length, presenting with juridical precision the full details of party usage in New York State and its violation by the Hunkers, whose history was described with a caustic pen. A full set of resolutions, for the most part orthodox in tone, was adopted; special praise was bestowed upon Thomas H. Benton and upon John A. Dix; and finally a full set of thirty-six delegates was named to go to Baltimore. Cambreleng and Jared Wilson were the delegates at large; Tilden, Denniston, Crain, King, and Wadsworth were among the district delegates. The Barnburner movement now began to attract widespread interest and attention in other states.

During the interval between this convention and the final test at Baltimore, the legislature adjourned. On this occasion, its Barnburner members, still keeping up the ancient practice, issued an address³ which elaborated and defended the following measures: revenue tariff, the Independent Treasury, prosecution of the Mexican War, and, chief of all, the exclusion of slavery from the Mexican cession. This address was written by the two Van Burens and Samuel J. Tilden,⁴ and marked the definite pronouncement of the elder Van Buren in favor of Free Soil. Butler, however, found fault with some passages in it attacking the President, probably on the ground of inexpediency, for he wrote "nothing is needed to give them [the Barnburner candidates at the next state election] the united vote of all Democrats not prepared to join the Whigs or to retire, except the recognition of the Baltimore Convention, whose decision therefore they must strive hard to get."⁵

This decision was an especially embarrassing one for the party to make, for it was quite evident that, despite the overwhelming success of nearly every measure Polk had set himself to enforce, the party would have no easy sailing in the approaching campaign. The Whigs were quite harmonious, and were likely to have the advantage of a military candidate who would embody all the virtues of successful patriotism and would not bear the stigma of unpopular motives or mistaken measures. This being the case, the national Democracy was anxious lest it render a decision repugnant

² Given in full in Gardiner, 76-92.

³ Tilden, II, 535 ff. ⁴ Shepard, 362.

⁵ *Van Buren Mss.*, LIV, 12788. Letter of May 8, 1848.

to either side. It therefore attempted to "straddle," and, as a step to safety, adopted a rule binding all delegates admitted to its councils to support the candidates chosen. On this test, the Barnburners balked; for the memories of '44 were still vivid; and they proposed to leave no stone unturned to thwart again, as they had done then, the bestowing of the highest party honors upon any of the "allies" who had so successfully checked the ambition of their idol, Van Buren. Of these candidates, Lewis Cass still remained the chief aspirant, and upon him the Barnburners were ready to inflict their wrath. The fact that Cass stood prominent among those Northern "Doughfaces" who had refused to entertain the idea of the Wilmot Proviso⁶ was to them a fortunate circumstance, for it enabled them to arraign him upon the grounds of principle as well as propriety. Having Cass in mind, but standing upon the assertion of their opponents' dishonest methods and disloyal doctrines, the Barnburners unanimously and fervently rejected the test which the convention sought to impose upon them.

In their course at Baltimore, the New York delegates were guided largely by the advice of Martin Van Buren, contained in a memorandum drawn up on May 3d and intrusted to his son John. In it he writes that

they must have no candidate to present, as that would impair their usefulness; they must not accept a New York man for Vice-President; they must not be over-anxious to be admitted, nor too indifferent about it; they must rest their case for admission solely on the validity of the two conventions held in New York, but not go too much into details, as that might let a few conservatives in. They must not pledge themselves to support anyone the convention might nominate; they must withdraw if their power is threatened with diminution. They should offer a resolution that the party be not committed to either side in the slavery issue; "irreconcilable differences of opinion exist between our political friends in different sections; . . . the requirement of a declared conformity to either side from the Democratic candidate would inevitably lead to a dissolution of the present organization of the Democratic party; and, sincerely desirous to uphold as long as practicable an organization from which the country has derived such great advantages, . . . this convention cannot give their sanction to any such requirement, but will on the contrary proceed to the designation of suitable candidates from among

⁶ See Rathbun's speech at Utica; Gardner, 94-95.

those who have not committed themselves to either side of this important and delicate question." The State of Georgia, certainly, and possibly the State of Alabama, had required a disavowal of the Wilmot Proviso from candidates looking for its support; Gen. Cass and Mr. Dallas disavowed it, on constitutional grounds, Mr. Buchanan, on the ground of expediency; the delegation should respectfully but firmly declare that neither of those gentlemen, if nominated, can obtain the vote of N. Y. The bench of the Supreme Court should not be contaminated by being made the seat of Presidential intrigue;⁷ the New York delegation might, if one of the above-named undesirable candidates be named, either announce, as Virginia did in respect to R. M. Johnson in 1835, that it would not support him, or it might recommend to the Utica convention in September to nominate a ticket, leaving the responsibility for the loss of the state upon others.⁸

Thus, by a process of exclusion, Van Buren had proscribed all of the "Northern men with Southern principles." Whom, then, did he wish to see the New Yorkers support, inasmuch as he had avowed his own disinclination to run?⁹ All occasion to answer that interesting question was cut off by the Barnburners' refusal of the test.

At the same time, the Hunkers accepted the test imposed, thereby convicting themselves, said their rivals, of a lack of any higher motive than their notorious "hunkering" for the spoils. Be that as it may, their acceptance placed them before the representatives of other Democratic states as the more regular and "loyal" of New York's two factions. Indeed, the more extreme of the Southern delegates, such as Bailey of Virginia and Strange of North Carolina, immediately raised the point¹⁰ that the Barnburners, in rejecting the authority of the convention and refusing to pledge their future course, placed themselves, ipso facto, outside the pale of the party and should no longer be heard. But the majority of the convention saw the inexpediency of such proscription and decided to hear the case. For two entire days the advocates of both sides presented their cases and heard and answered a host of questions flung at them by the anxious and rather impatient

⁷ A slap at Woodbury, of N. H., one of the "allies" of '44, now in the Court.

⁸ Draft in the *Van Buren Mss.*, LIV, 12777 ff.

⁹ "You lately refused the delegation of this state, in the event of their reception by the Baltimore convention, permission

to use your name as a candidate before that body."—Letter of Delegates to the Utica Convention to M. Van Buren, June 16, 1848, Gardiner, 109.

¹⁰ Von Holst, Hermann, *Constitutional and Political History of the United States*, II, 364.

delegates. These questions pertained to the course pursued by the New York Democrats, in 1844 and since that year, especially in relation to the Wilmot Proviso and other national issues. On these subjects, the Barnburners and their opponents were each able to cite objectionable conduct on the part of the other, so that in the end the wary convention was fain to offer a compromise. The full set of delegates presented by each side was to be admitted, but each delegate was to have only one-half a vote—"They might occupy half a seat apiece,"¹¹ said Stanton, "provided each of them would let a Hunker sit on his lap." The offer of the compromise was carried by only 126 votes to 124, and 99 of the affirmative votes came from the North, which realized more fully the seriousness of the situation.¹² So far as it was a triumph for either side, it was so for the Barnburners, for the temper of the convention from the first was against them.¹³ But the Barnburners would not consent; for they argued, with sound logic, that it would savor of a time-serving spirit of compromise and destroy the basis of their assertion that they were contending for a principle.

They respectfully declined the proposition, and in their reply stated that "they [the Hunkers] and our constituents differ essentially in political principles and action"; that the other side included men who: (1) opposed the Independent Treasury; (2) were hostile to the debt-paying policy of New York in 1842; (3) lobbied against the Tariff of 1846; (4) fought to prevent a constitutional convention in 1846; (5) treacherously defeated Silas Wright in 1846; (6) attempted at the Syracuse Convention (September, 1847) to subvert the traditional organization of the party; (7) "Unblushingly advocate the extension of slavery into territory now free."¹⁴ They therefore withdrew and, without further parley, returned to New York, outlaws now from the ranks of the party in which many of them had been leading figures for a generation. They attributed their exclusion¹⁵ to the Free-Soil resolution they had repeatedly adopted, of which the *Baltimore Republican* and *Argus* had said, "Now let this be called what it may in New York, it is the worst kind of Whiggery in our eyes."¹⁶

¹¹ Stanton, 80.

¹² Stanwood, 232-233.

¹³ Gardiner, 96.

¹⁴ Tilden, I, 244-245.

¹⁵ See Tilden, I, 241-242.

¹⁶ Quoted in the *Argus*, Nov. 9, 1847.

In their absence, the convention organized with great appearance of harmony, and, on the fourth ballot, nominated the hated Cass to head the national ticket. This completed, as it seemed, the justification for the Barnburners' rupture with the Democratic party; and they prepared to fight Cass' election by every means in their power.

To Martin Van Buren in particular, this nomination sounded like a challenge which he could not decline. During the previous year, he had received repeated solicitations to reënter the political arena as a presidential candidate; but, as we have said, he had waived them all. These entreaties came from many quarters of the North, but chiefly from New England, Pennsylvania, and Illinois, as well as from all parts of New York state.¹⁷ Their writers included, among others, Gideon Welles and David Wilmot, whose arguments were based chiefly on the great gap in Northern leadership left by the death of Silas Wright, and the danger of "half-way measures" in the existing emergency. The seriousness of the situation now seemed to be heightened by the renewed exhibition of Southern dominance just shown at Baltimore. Van Buren may also have thought that, in the existing state of Northern discontent, there was a possibility for a Free-Soil victory by throwing the election into the House of Representatives.¹⁸ While these considerations finally prevailed with him, his friend and follower, William Allen Butler, expressed his opinion that "Mr. Van Buren's name was in it, but not his head nor his heart,"¹⁹ and Gillet said that "in 1848, he [Van Buren] consented to be governed by the judgment and wishes of certain of his friends, and, yielding his own inclinations, reluctantly consented to run for President."²⁰

The return of the bolting delegates to New York City was made the occasion of a remarkable manifestation of welcome. A monster mass-meeting was held in City Hall Park, at which the Barnburners' ablest orators told the story of their experience at Baltimore, flayed the arguments and tactics of the opposition, and pictured in lurid colors the arrogant domination of the South in the party councils. Samuel Young declared, "A clap of political thunder will be heard in this country next November that will

¹⁷ *Van Buren Mss.*, LIV, LV, *passim*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, LV, 12834. Letter of Marcus

Morton to Flagg.

¹⁹ Butler, 33.

²⁰ Gillet, *Democracy*, 192.

make the propagandists of slavery shake like Belshazzar."²¹ Every thrust was applauded by the enthusiastic crowd; and it became evident that the populace of the metropolis would largely support a movement to enforce the protest of the rejected men. The outcome of this meeting was, that a resolution was decisively carried to call a state convention for the purpose of organizing an independent movement to "prevent a repetition of the treason of 1844," i.e., to insure the defeat of Cass. Again Flagg protested, because the call had not gone out from Baltimore,²² and Butler wrote he feared the proposed convention would be a failure.²³

The Utica convention met on June 22, 1848, and was numerously attended by those who had been at Baltimore and those who were in sympathy with them, including a few from neighboring states. It was organized by choosing Samuel Young as chairman. A stirring address was read, recounting the wrongs suffered by the Radicals at the hands of their factional opponents and the crowning wrong now inflicted by an ungrateful and unprincipled national organization. Then a platform, drawn up by a committee of which Butler—who evidently had changed his mind about the gathering—was chairman, was presented and adopted. The platform reaffirmed allegiance to all the historic Democratic doctrines. But of the 1600 words of the platform, more than 500 were devoted to the question of the Wilmot Proviso and the limitation of slavery territory by the United States. This evidently was the chief, as it was in fact the only distinctive, plank in the platform upon which the protestants were prepared to launch a new party. Upon such a platform, Martin Van Buren was nominated for President, and the coöperation solicited of all men who considered these principles vital.

The nomination of Van Buren caused a sensation throughout the country. It was the first time in the history of the nation that an ex-President had emerged from retirement to accept a

²¹ Stanton, 80.

²² Also, he opposed a separate ticket because "if the free states are prepared for a grand rally for freedom at this time I have seen no evidence of it, save in this state." Letter to Van Buren, June 19; *Van Buren Mss.*

²³ "The General Committee passed resolutions cordially approving the nominations of Cass and Wm. O. Butler . . . after this disgraceful submission, it would not be possible to bring together people enough to give weight or influence to the meeting," etc. Letter to Van Buren, May 31. *Van Buren Mss.*, LV, 12804.

nomination for the highest office, and that too from an organization other than the one to which he had owed his first success. Three times²⁴ since then has the first of these precedents been followed, and the second one, twice;²⁵ and in every case by a son of New York. Surely there was something prophetic in Van Buren's action. Regular Democrats professed to be shocked by his course. They denounced it as unworthy of the high dignity of his former position. They declared it savored of personal ambition, which, they said, had ever been his characteristic. They talked of petty spite, which would deny to another, not less worthy than himself, the gratification of legitimate ambition. They sniffed suspiciously at "Little Van's" fervor in behalf of the anti-slavery sentiment, undreamed of during the four years he was in the "Presidential chair," when he and his satellite and fellow "martyr," Silas Wright, had turned a cold shoulder to such appeals and had voted for the application of the "gag rule" to abolition petitions.

Unmindful of these gibes, Van Buren and his friends persisted steadily in their course. Encouragement flowed in upon them,²⁶ and the whole North, they were told, realized the issue and were awaiting the leader. Not alone the Barnburners of New York, but generous spirits everywhere, were enthusiastically impatient for the call. Many dissatisfied Whigs would join.²⁷ So the call was made to gather at Buffalo early in August. "The Free-Soil flood had overflowed the Barnburner dikes."²⁸

This convention at Buffalo was one of the most spectacular and remarkable gatherings of all that eventful period. It met, sat, and dissolved in an atmosphere of spontaneous, almost religious, enthusiasm reminding us of the Jacobin excitement of 1793 or the later 'craze' for free silver, or the 'Armageddon' campaign. Every free state and three slave states were represented. Charles Francis Adams of Massachusetts presided. The sessions took place under a mammoth tent, from which the sweltering heat drove great numbers of men to seek refuge outside, where the difficulties taxed the skill of the cleverest party orators and entertainers to control

²⁴ In 1856, by Millard Fillmore; in 1892, by Grover Cleveland; in 1912, by Theodore Roosevelt.

²⁵ By Fillmore and by Roosevelt.

²⁶ *Van Buren Mss.*, LV, 12813, 12830, etc.

²⁷ See telegram of the "Tippecanoe Association"; Gardiner, 116.

²⁸ Stanton, 80.

the audience.²⁹ Large crowds of spectators gathered out of curiosity, and of these many were converted by the vivid eloquence of speakers, who included such stars as Cambreleng, Tilden, Young, and John Van Buren.

It was a motley throng, well typifying the old adage "Politics makes strange bed-fellows." There were gathered there anti-slavery Democrats eager to free the party from Southern domination, indifferent Democrats seeking revenge on Cass, anti-slavery Whigs, and Henry Clay Whigs disgusted with the nomination of Taylor. Mingled with all these were the original Abolitionists, no doubt chary of their new allies, but ready to overlook much for the sake of the cause. To lead such an incongruous throng, were men of conspicuous ability, the ablest Democrats of the state. The very recital of these leaders' names is enough to indicate their predominance. Samuel Young and John Van Buren had enjoyed almost a monopoly of the highest offices that used to be filled by Democratic legislatures under the old constitution. Dean Richmond and Sanford E. Church were to become two of the ablest political managers that this state of politicians has ever produced. William Cullen Bryant and Henry W. Van Dyck wielded the most eloquent and trenchant pens employed in the press of the state. David Dudley Field and Samuel J. Tilden were just reaching the apex of the intellectual powers that in years to come were to make them national figures. Preston King, James S. Wadsworth, Reuben E. Fenton, and John A. Dix were a few of the other members of that notable body whose names were to be household words. Little wonder that a body composed of such men inscribed on its banners "Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor and Free Men," and resolved to make the fight national. Martin Van Buren was reaffirmed as the candidate of the party,³⁰ and Charles Francis Adams was named as his running-mate.

In state politics, the Barnburners emphasized their rejection of the authority of the new committee established at Syracuse the year before, by perfecting their own organization wherever possible. Local committees, called "Jefferson Committees," were organized in many communities, and candidates placed in nomination for

²⁹ Alexander, II, 132.

³⁰ By a vote of 159 to 129 for John P. Hale; Stanwood, 172.

the legislature. The convention, arranged for at Herkimer, was held at Utica on September 14th; and there John A. Dix, who had upheld Free-Soil principles in the Senate with much vigor, was nominated for governor and Seth Gates of Wyoming County, for lieutenant-governor. Dix, it was said, had at first promised to support the Baltimore candidates, while Gates was a former Whig who had become a prominent Abolitionist, and was nominated to win the support of the abolition element.⁸¹ At the same time, the Hunkers named Chancellor Walworth for governor and Charles O'Connor for lieutenant-governor.

The campaign that followed, while perhaps not equal to that of 1844 in closeness and excitement, was not inferior to it in bitterness. It soon became evident that the Free-Soilers would draw much more from the strength of the Democrats than from the Whigs. It also seemed likely that Cass and Taylor would so evenly divide the rest of the country that New York with its 36 electoral votes would once more be the pivotal state. Every effort was, therefore, bent to capture it; but, on the part of the regular Democratic organization, the task was hopeless.

The Free-Soil ticket was contemptuously denounced as the "cod-fish and cabbage" ticket; and a letter of Adams', written in 1844, was published, in which the writer asserted of his present running-mate that "he had bargained away the right of petition, protection to home industry, freedom of speech, and indeed almost every other security of liberty. . . ." ⁸² To this, the Free-Soilers replied that they were not supporting the Van Buren of 1836-40, but a man of riper years and sounder political judgment.

Early in the summer, President Polk saw that many office-holders in New York were in active sympathy with the Free-Soil movement. He then began to consider the advisability of removing these men from office. Several references in his diary show that he discussed the matter with leaders of the party who might be supposed to know the circumstances and to offer sound counsel regarding the situation. Some, including Senator Dickinson, advised the removals as an act of party discipline while others recommended overlooking the provocation for the sake of pru-

⁸¹ McGuire, I, 257. Gillet, *Democracy*, 209.

⁸² McGuire, *ibid.*

dence.³³ The President eventually decided to act; and, on September 1st, he demanded and received the resignation of Benjamin F. Butler, United States Attorney. On account of Butler's prominence, the act attracted widespread attention and was commented on according to the predilections of those commenting. Its motive³⁴ was well understood, and it was regarded as an "act of war." Butler had already been very active in the Free-Soil movement, and helped materially to achieve its success in the state. Another who was punished for "offensive factionalism" was A. S. Rathbun, postmaster at Auburn, brother of Congressman Rathbun. The *Utica Observer* said of him, "We would not remove him because he is a Barnburner, but because he and the other bolters advocate policies which, if persisted in, will lead to the dissolution of the Union." Another Barnburner leader who would probably have suffered a like punishment to Butler's was Michael Hoffman; but his death anticipated the President's action. It is probable that the presidential removals rather aided than damaged the third party movement in New York State, by strengthening the general impression of the arrogance of the Southern group, to which Cass was supposed to be subservient.

As the unusual canvass drew to a close, it was seen that Cass' chances of success, without New York's electoral vote, were slight. New England, except New Hampshire and Maine, remained staunchly Whig; Pennsylvania bade fair to rebuke the enactment of the lower tariff in 1846; in the West, Cass' strength, outside of his own state, was doubtful. Every effort was now made to swing New York for the Michigan man, but all in vain. The "crusade" started at Buffalo gained in impetus; and, when the popular votes were counted, it was found that not only had Cass failed, but that he had run third in the state, the votes being: Taylor, 218,603; Van Buren, 120,510; Cass, 114,318.³⁵ It thus appeared that the third party had captured almost half of the regular Democratic votes of the state, in addition to the abolitionists and others

³³ "Mr. Buchanan said he would remove them the moment the election was over." *Diary*, July 8, 1848.

³⁴ "Mr. Butler, at the time he was appointed, was a Democrat. He has since abandoned the Democratic party . . .

and is endeavoring to divide the country into geographical parties." *Polk's Diary*, IV, 114-115.

³⁵ Stanwood, Edward, *Presidential Elections*, 176.

who had joined in its support, while the Whigs had neither gained nor lost directly by the movement. Taylor received the 36 electoral votes of New York, which furnished the whole of the margin by which he won in the nation. The vote for governor showed little deviation from that for president. Fish, Whig, ran 173 votes ahead of Taylor; Dix, 2301 ahead of Van Buren; and Walworth, 2497 ahead of Cass.³⁶ The Whigs elected 108 assemblymen, the Barnburners, 14, and the Hunkers, 6. The Whigs also got 31 out of 34 congressmen.³⁷ Democratic dissensions had ended in the inevitable outcome.³⁸

In other states, the Free-Soil vote showed notable gains over 1844, and it was apparent that, to some extent, Van Buren's name had added to their strength. Van Buren tickets were in the field in all the states where Birney had received votes in 1844, and also in Wisconsin and Iowa, admitted since then.³⁹ Van Buren received more votes than Cass in both Vermont and Massachusetts, and also did well in Maine, Ohio, and Wisconsin. His total vote was 291,203, about ten per cent of the entire number of votes cast in the country.

³⁶ Alexander, II, 144.

³⁷ In the district comprising St. Lawrence and Lewis counties the Barnburners nominated for congress, William Collins, a very young man. The Hunkers nominated Judge Edwin Dodge, of Gouverneur, grandfather of recent Secretary of State, Robert Lansing. . . . Later, the Whigs and Hunkers united on Francis

Seeger, former clerk of the Assembly and of the constitutional convention of 1846. In the ensuing campaign, one of the hottest on record, Collins won by about 150 majority. Interview with Hon. C. D. Adams, of Utica.

³⁸ See Appendix III.

³⁹ He also received scattering votes in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia.

CHAPTER XII

THE END OF THE BARNBURNER MOVEMENT

THE campaign of 1848 marked the high tide of the Barnburner movement. With the defeat of Cass, the Barnburners had attained their much-desired object of punishing the "treason" committed against their chiefs in 1844 and 1846. Themselves outgeneralled and thrust out of power, they had proved that it was impossible for their rivals to rise successfully upon their ruins. They had demonstrated to all, without as well as within the state, that the electoral vote of New York depended, for the time being at least, on their decision. But in doing so, they had become allied with uncongenial comrades; and a feeling of restlessness arose within them as to where they should turn or what they should do next. At first, the talk was all of going straight ahead, keeping the ranks closed and forming no alliances. Thus Henry S. Randall, of Cortland, wrote to Van Buren one month after the election, "We . . . that class of young, able and educated men who have led in the Free-Soil movement . . . are prepared to abide the issue. Our path is *onward*. . . . Being placed now where there are no obligations of party fidelity to stay our hands, we mean that the reckoning shall be a full and final one. They [the Free-Soilers] will, *if led boldly on*, become the dominant party throughout the West. I give my vote to go the full length."¹ But to many this seemed an unprofitable and unwise plan. Under it, they would be strong in the state, yet not strong enough to control, while in most other states they would remain the insignificant minority with a fair chance of having their principal national issue taken away from them by some coup of the "conscience" section of the victorious Whigs. Under these circumstances, dissensions in their ranks quickly appeared. Those whose motives were largely personal began to forget their griev-

¹ *Van Buren Mss.*, LVI, 13112-13.
Letter of Dec. 18, 1848.

ances and to advocate reconciliation with their late rivals, to oppose and oust the common enemy. On the other hand, those who sincerely and stubbornly believed that "No new slave territory" should be kept a leading national issue were willing to perpetuate the breach that had been opened. They determined to strengthen their weak national organization, while waiting for events that were clearly inevitable but, as time showed, destined not to occur immediately.

There has always been disagreement as to how far the Barnburner movement in 1848 was actuated by principles and how far by the desire for revenge. It is obvious, of course, that each motive influenced some, as indeed every reform movement attracts a certain proportion of men who seek to use it selfishly. In this case, the consensus of opinion has seemed to be that personality held a larger place than principle. Thus, Professor Macy observes: "Certain it is that the Free-Soil campaign was so managed as to enable the Barnburners to administer punishment to their enemies in their own party. After this was accomplished, Martin Van Buren and nearly all of the distinguished Democrats who had acted with him were reabsorbed into the Democratic party."² Seilhamer—who is not however an unbiased critic—declares, "This [the defeat of Cass] accomplished, many of them were willing to forget their anti-slavery professions, and reunite with the old party in its pro-slavery crusade."³ Schurz thinks "There is no doubt that by many the anti-slavery current of the time was merely used as a convenient weapon, in the war of Democratic factions, to avenge Martin Van Buren and his following. . . ."⁴ And Prof. McLaughlin, the sympathetic biographer of Cass, sums up: "Many, of course, were not so much friends of freedom as foes of those who had disappointed their own fond hopes for their chief; and longings for revenge were at the bottom of many of their aspirations for free soil. . . . The Democratic support of Van Buren in New York was decisive. This cannot be attributed to anti-slavery sentiment. The Barnburners, fighting for political existence and revenge, and aided by opponents of slavery, polled more votes than the 'regular' faction. This fact proves that personal

² Macy, Jesse, *History of Political Parties*, 175.

³ Seilhamer, George O., compiler, *History of the Republican Party*, I, 7.

⁴ Schurz, Carl, *Henry Clay*, II, 311-312.

pique was the great motive in that state of politicians."⁵ A nearer and not less trustworthy judgment of them is contained in Butler's characterization: "Mr. Van Buren [the elder] was too deeply intrenched in his old political notions to utter them [the words 'Free Soil,' etc.] in earnest. . . . Some of its promoters were in it from principle, some from association, some out of revenge, some as a mere game of Albany politics, directed by a Regency of a later date, carrying on business at the old stand."⁶

There is a large element of truth in these opinions, especially as relates to the Van Burens. John Van Buren was the life of the movement in '48; wherever he went, men's eyes were on him. Had he seized his fortune at the flood, and gone in heart and soul to the Free-Soil movement, his own history and that of the country would doubtless have been different. Fenton declared he could have had Fremont's chance; and, if he had, he would surely have made more of it than Fremont did. The conclusion is inevitable that with *him* zeal for restriction of slavery was not a vital motive; in his later years, it is said,⁷ he used to explain his activity in '48 by relating the story of the boy who was frantically tossing an overturned load of hay and, when questioned as to why he worked so hard, answered without stopping, "Stranger, dad's under there!" But, it seems quite certain that in this case, "dad was under there" because of his son; in other words, that John Van Buren led his father into the Barnburner revolt. The elder Van Buren never publicly regretted his act; in 1858 he told Stanton, that "his utterances on the great evil were his matured convictions";⁸ "with serious earnestness, he added, 'the end of slavery will come—amid terrible convulsions, I fear, but it will come.'" Why, then, did he support Pierce against Hale in 1852, Buchanan in 1856, the anti-Lincoln ticket in 1860? The explanation most conformable with his experience and his temperament is, that he thought the end of slavery should come constitutionally and through the Democratic party rather than through other methods and agencies.

This explanation also applies to Loomis, Cambreleng, Butler, and Dix—though the Civil War eventually drove Dix into the Republican ranks. It is not justifiable to say that they were not sincere

⁵ McLaughlin, A. C., *Lewis Cass*, 241, 261.

⁶ Butler, 33-34.

⁷ Alexander, II, 129.

⁸ Stanton, 87.

in their professions against slavery, proved as those were, in such cases as Dix's, by the boldest action. They simply could not tolerate the heterogeneous, more or less disorderly elements that probably seemed to them to stand in the way of a proper solution.⁹ Arphaxed Loomis, whose clear and constructive mind was recognized by all men, believed that the proper course to pursue was to remain in the Democratic party, to help make it the anti-slavery party of New York and of the Union. He said, "We can exercise more influence with our friends—with our own party—than we can standing outside as antagonists."¹⁰ "He had always been opposed to Mr. Seward on all points except on the slavery question, and he could not consent to support a movement to sustain . . . Mr. Seward's general policy." For these reasons he refused to become a Republican.

To others, like Seymour, Tilden, and O'Connor, the issue of slavery did not loom so large. They really believed the Compromise of 1850 a fair solution, and that would be enough to account for their taking what, in those excitable days, must have seemed, what their enemies freely called it, a pro-Southern course.

Lastly, there were those to whom the issue of Free Soil really was the great issue, and their solution of it the only proper one. Men like Preston King, Wadsworth, Fenton, and Field joined the Republican Party naturally on that account. They were logical; but to approve their course does not require us to condemn that of the other eminent and high-minded men of the Barnburner movement, who did not agree with them that that was the proper course. On the whole, the participation of nearly all the Barnburner leaders and of most of their rank and file was sincere, though a great many of them accepted the necessity of the issue from their hearty belief in the sincerity of Martin Van Buren.¹¹

In the summer of 1849, determined efforts were made by practical men on both sides to reunite the two hostile factions of the late Democracy of New York. At the suggestion of the Demo-

⁹ Memoirs of John A. Dix, quoted in Alexander, II, 133, foot.

¹⁰ Address of George W. Smith, in *Papers Read before the Herkimer County Hist. Soc.*, II, 109 ff.

¹¹ The resolution of the Free Democ-

racy extended praise to him because he "almost alone among the elder statesmen of the country, fully identified himself with the opponents of slavery extension, and bore their standard with calm courage," etc. *Van Buren Mss.*, LVI, 13135.

cratic members of the legislature, the state conventions of the Barnburners and Hunkers were held in Rome at the same time, August 15-17. They failed, however, to coalesce, because the Barnburners accused the Hunker convention, over which William L. Marcy presided, of trying to impose a pro-slavery creed. On September 6th, the "regular" state convention (Hunker) met in Syracuse and adopted a resolution that "the Democratic state committee shall impose no test upon the said candidates . . . inconsistent with the free-soil resolutions adopted by the convention held at Rome."¹² They then nominated a full ticket, but authorized the state committee to withdraw four of the candidates in case the Utica convention, to be held on September 12th, should make suitable nominations.¹³ The "Radicals," i.e., the Barnburners, accepted the opportunity, and a frail fusion was effected. When it was suggested as incongruous that those who had so lately been denouncing each other, should now be yielding places to one another, John Van Buren replied, "We are asked to compromise our principles. The day of compromise is past; but in regard to candidates for state officers, we are still a commercial people. We will unite with our late antagonists, and will hold them as we hold the rest of mankind—enemies in war, in peace, friends."¹⁴ The effort to arrange a fusion ticket nearly broke down over the question of the state treasurership. Randall of Cortland had expected the joint nomination, but the Hunkers had already named Tompkins, another Barnburner whom John Van Buren favored in the interest of party harmony. Van Buren sought to persuade Randall to withdraw, but the latter naturally enough refused. Van Buren's influence, however, was great enough to defeat Randall—but the contest left its stings. Both principals wrote to Martin Van Buren their own versions. Of the two letters, Randall's is much the more amicable; "Prince John" says, "I think the man is either a fool or a knave; I don't know but both."¹⁵ This incident would suggest that the love of faction fighting for its own sake had gotten into the blood of some of the Barnburners.

The effort to rehabilitate and harmonize the Democracy was not immediately successful; for, of the fusion ticket named by

¹² *Democratic Review*, XXV, 485 ff.

¹³ McGuire, I, 266.

¹⁴ Stanton, 82.

¹⁵ *Van Buren Mss.*, LVI, 13227a.

the late conventions, every candidate but one was defeated. This defeat was the more humiliating because it contrasted so glaringly with the general Democratic success elsewhere, in that year. It was due in part to the unexpectedly heavy vote polled, for an off year, by the Whigs,¹⁶ and more to the smoldering intolerance of each other exhibited by the two Democratic factions. It was charged by a critic of the time that "in violation of the rule that there was to be no test, the Lockport Free-Soil committee addressed test questions to the leading candidates,"¹⁷ on the power, duty, and propriety of Congress restricting slavery in the territories; and that "most of the candidates treated these impertinent queries with the contempt they deserved."

The next year, however, the two factions seemed to be somewhat more harmonious. Only one convention was held, and to this Barnburner delegates, including John Van Buren, were admitted on their own terms; in fact, as someone put it, they were not received back into the party; they simply walked back without asking. Among the resolutions, which were offered by Charles O'Connor, was one which stated, "That we congratulate the country upon the recent settlement by Congress¹⁸ of the questions which have unhappily divided the people of these states." When this came to a vote, it was carried with only some 20 dissenting votes, although it was diametrically opposed to the Buffalo platform of 1848. For the time being, the Barnburners agreed to join with the rest of the country in accepting the Compromise, and they agreed to support the state ticket, on which they had representatives, although Horatio Seymour headed it. As a result, the entire ticket was elected, except Seymour, who failed by only 262 votes, owing to discrimination against him in the anti-rent counties, as in Wright's case in 1846.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the breach was far from closed. A writer in the *Democratic Review* called attention²⁰ to the fact that "the result in the assembly districts [which went

¹⁶ The vote for Hunt, Whig, for comptroller, was only about 6 per cent less than Taylor's presidential vote for the year before, and more than 18 per cent above Fillmore's vote in 1847. The vote for Lott, Democrat, for comptroller, was 15 per cent less than the combined Van Buren-Cass vote in the state in 1848. Official canvass.

¹⁷ *Democratic Review*, XXV, *ut supra*.

¹⁸ I. e., the Compromise of 1850.

¹⁹ In nine anti-rent counties, Seymour was 128 behind Hunt, Whig, while Sanford E. Church, Seymour's running mate, won by 9763. *Democratic Review*, XXVII, 529 ff.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

overwhelmingly Whig] proves that the union has been a mere truce, an agreement upon candidates, not generally upon principles, a coalition."

In 1851, fusion was still closer, and success correspondingly greater. The old canal issue, which had originally split the party, came up again, in a form which drove both factions together. "The positions taken by the convention were harmoniously and unanimously reached, and by no delegate was any extreme proposal made or expression uttered."²¹ The reunited Democracy elected most of the state officers, including Henry S. Randall for secretary of state, and, more significant still, succeeded in capturing the Assembly.

Finally, in 1852, the restoration of party unity seemed complete. "At Tammany's Fourth of July celebration, the presence of the prominent leaders who bolted in 1848 gave evidence of the party's reunion. The chief speaker was John Van Buren. Upon the platform sat John A. Dix, Preston King, and Churchill C. Cambreleng. Of the letters read, one was from Martin Van Buren."²² Evidently, the Barnburners were no longer considered as different from other Democrats. As a result of the triumphant campaign that followed, Horatio Seymour at length attained the goal he had previously missed so narrowly—the governorship—and carried into office with him the whole ticket. His inaugural message made important suggestions with regard to improving the canal system, and these he followed up in a special message of April 5th; but natural economic changes had already much reduced the former importance of those waterways, and events proved that with this had also been practically destroyed "the canal issue," as a cause of party discord.

To be sure, the turbulent Democracy of New York split again in this very year, but this was due more to questions of affiliation with the national organization than to the old issues. Sufficient proof of this is found in the new names given to the two sides, and in the fact that ex-Hunkers and ex-Barnburners were indiscriminately mingled in the leadership of both the opposing factions, the "Hards" and "Softs."²³

²¹ McGuire, I, 282-283.

²³ McGuire, I, 290-295.

²² Alexander, II, 177.

The real sequel of the Barnburner movement came in the organization of the Republican party in New York. The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act destroyed forever the illusive "harmony" which had seemed to be secured by the Compromise of 1850, and at the same time made it clear that the great anti-slavery party of the Union was not to be, as some had hoped, the Democratic party. The Whigs were moribund, and their leaders quickly recognized the necessity of merging into a new party with some of their former foes. They promptly sought the coöperation of the Barnburner chiefs, whose antagonism to slavery they counted upon; and their search was not in vain. Nearly all the Radical leaders who had stood for the Wilmot Proviso in 1846 and had attended the Barnburner conventions of 1847 and '48—in other words, the sincere Free-Soil Democrats—flocked to the new organization. Stanton²⁴ declares that every Democrat who voted for a radical resolution, which he offered in the legislature, during the discussion of the compromise growing out of the Mexican War, subsequently became a member of the Republican party. Many others whose names have been mentioned in these pages joined the rising tide of Republicanism and many obtained high honors by doing so. Fenton, the later war governor, Preston King, and John A. Dix were conspicuous examples; and, of the lesser lights, Ward Hunt, Nathaniel S. Benton, Abijah Beckwith, and E. A. Maynard will serve as examples. Of still younger men, later known to fame as Republicans, whose first political experience was obtained in the ranks of Barnburners, Elbridge G. Lapham was one. Those Free-Soil Barnburners who did not become Republicans were chiefly the older men, of the type of Loomis and Flagg, who could not break the associations of a lifetime. As was said of them, in discussing one of their number,²⁵ "they returned to the Democratic party, but never failed to denounce the slave power."

To the Republican cause, the Barnburners contributed much that was essential. First, they furnished a practical issue, one that appealed to the country as abolition could not do. Second, they gave leaders—men of experience, like King and Field, and men of vision and determination, whose very names made the cause

²⁴ Stanton, 82.

²⁵ Charles A. Mann, a leader in Oneida Co., *George W. Smith Mss.*

respectable. Finally, they gave themselves—a body of voters, whose numbers, added to the bulk of the disbanded Whigs, quickly made the state Republican. A brief examination of the map²⁶ showing the localization of the Barnburners at the height of their power will convince one of the importance of their support to the success of the new party. Counties like St. Lawrence, that had never been Whig, became the strongholds of Republicanism; these same counties had been the strongholds of Radicalism in the days of Silas Wright. Judge Adams, who was then a young man, testifies that the young men of northern New York had been mostly Barnburners, while their elders had feared “mob rule” and “letting down the gates.” These young men now went over to the Republican party en masse. In 1856, Lewis county, which had been Democratic by 300 to 400, gave a Republican plurality of 2500! In the town of Lowville, which had been previously quite evenly divided, a contemporary said: “I was one of only 42 men who voted for Buchanan [out of over 600 voters].”²⁷ So completely did the secession of the Barnburners destroy the once-powerful Democratic sentiment in that part of the state. The conclusion is irresistible that the Republican party in New York, and, by virtue of it, the Republican party in the Union, received a decisive increment of strength from the accession of the Barnburners; and that Senator Hoar was correct in calling the movement which culminated at Buffalo in 1848, “the origin of the Republican party.”²⁸

²⁶ See Appendix IV.

²⁸ Quoted in Curtis, Francis, *The Re-*

²⁷ Interview with Hon. C. D. Adams. *publican Party*, I, 114-115.

CONCLUSIONS

OUR study of Democratic politics in New York during the eventful second quarter of the nineteenth century leads us to the following conclusions:

First, the cleavage within the Democratic ranks grew out of a difference in principles, which was real, not assumed, as some have thought. The special demands of the Radicals were restriction of public works, economy and safety in state finance, and limitation of the power of the legislature in matters of debt. These were essentially state issues and gave to their advocates the character and reputation of a state faction. To these they were consistently and persistently loyal, while their opponents, forced to agree to these demands for a time by compulsion of public feeling, intended to evade them when the opportunity should arise. This intention the Radicals thwarted, but with a tactlessness and vehemence that further estranged their associates. In their advocacy of these principles, the Radicals were ahead of their age, but their ideas were afterward largely adopted. The movement that began with the "People's Resolution" and culminated in the Constitutional Convention of 1846 was distinctly guided by them; and the constitution that was then adopted and whose principles are still substantially in force, was strongly stamped with their influence.

Second, in larger fields, outside of their particular state problems, the Radicals naturally adopted the more progressive ideas. Owing in part to their accustomed independence in thought, and in part to their hostile relations with the national administration, they readily adopted Free-Soil principles, and transferred most of their strength in the country districts to the parties that advocated such ideas. This resulted in making western and northern New York a Republican stronghold from 1855, on.

Third, their connection with the cause of Martin Van Buren was more incidental than fundamental. The disappointment of Van Buren did not create the Barnburner movement, as has been often alleged. Rather, Van Buren's friends took advantage of a

body of Radical opinion already existent; but, in doing so, they had to adopt its principles, and their support and leadership helped immensely to vitalize and popularize those principles.

Fourth, the failure of the Barnburners to secure their objects more fully was due in part to their being in advance of their time, but in large measure to the political deficiency of their leaders. Azariah C. Flagg was their ablest politician in their early period, but he was handicapped by the impetuosity and violence of men like Hoffman and Young. Martin Van Buren was their wisest counsellor in their later days, but his age and his situation rendered it impossible for him to give them the great aid he could have given a dozen years before. The Barnburner chiefs, in spite of their intellectual and moral predominance, were unable to cope with such masters of party management as Croswell, Seymour, Marcy, and Dickinson, and consequently they met discomfiture on many occasions when victory seemed inevitable.

Fifth, in spite of these disappointments, the Barnburner movement had permanent results of great importance. Its fusion of the three currents—demand for constitutional and fiscal reform, demand for slavery restriction in the territories, and resentment of Southern domination in national politics—started a great impetus toward the break-up of the ruling Democratic party; it contributed vitally to the successful formation of the next dominant party, the Republican; and it introduced progressive features and helped to popularize progressive principles in laws and public affairs. For these reasons, the Barnburner movement must be ranked as one of the most significant political movements in American politics.

APPENDICES, BIBLIOGRAPHY, AND INDEX

APPENDIX I

DIVISION OF DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE IN THE SENATORIAL NOMI- NATING CAUCUS, 1845

	COUNTIES	
I. <i>Supporting Dix,</i>	Tompkins	Schoharie
<i>Radical</i>	Wayne	Steuben
Cayuga	Westchester	Suffolk
Clinton	II. <i>Supporting Dick-</i>	Sullivan
Columbia	<i>inson, Hunker</i>	Ulster
Delaware	Chenango	Warren
Fulton	Chemung	III. <i>Evenly Divided</i>
Hamilton	Cortland	Orange
Herkimer	Greene	Oswego
Jefferson	Lewis	Otsego
Onondaga	Madison	Seneca
Putnam	Montgomery	Tioga
Rockland	Oneida	
St. Lawrence	Queens	

Jefferson Co. Democrat, Jan. 23, 1845.

Counties not named either were represented in the legislature by Whigs, or their representatives were absent from the caucus.

APPENDIX II

FACTIONAL AFFILIATION OF DEMOCRATIC NEWSPAPERS IN NEW YORK STATE, 1846-48

I. BARNBURNER PAPERS

A—Paper published or approved the publication of the *Atlas* extra, "Causes and Consequences" (of Gov. Wright's defeat), during the winter of 1846-47.

B—Carried Silas Wright's name on its editorial page as its choice for President.

C—Did not approve secession from the party.

<i>Name of Paper</i>	<i>Where published</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Albany Atlas	Albany, Albany Co.	A
Cayuga Patriot	Auburn, Cayuga Co.	
Cayuga Tocsin	Auburn, Cayuga Co.	A, B
Mayville Sentinel	Mayville, Chautauqua Co.	
Elmira Gazette	Elmira, Chemung Co.	
Plattsburg Republican	Plattsburg, Clinton Co.	
Buffalo Republic	Buffalo, Erie Co.	A
Franklin Gazette	Malone, Franklin Co.	C
Catskill Recorder	Catskill, Greene Co.	
Prattsburg Republican	Prattsburg, Greene Co.	
Mohawk Courier	Little Falls, Herkimer Co.	A
Jefferson Co. Democrat	Watertown, Jefferson Co.	A
Lewis Co. Democrat	Turin, Lewis Co.	
Evening Post	New York, New York Co.	A
Niagara Cataract	Lockport, Niagara Co.	A
Newburgh Telegraph	Newburgh, Orange Co.	
Goshen Clarion	Goshen, Orange Co.	
Utica Democrat	Utica, Oneida Co.	A
Onondaga Standard	Syracuse, Onondaga Co.	A
Ontario Messenger	Canandaigua, Ontario Co.	A
Western Atlas	Ontario Co.	

Oswego Palladium	Oswego, Oswego Co.	
Westchester & Putnam Democrat	Carmel, Putnam Co.	
Troy Budget	Troy, Rensselaer Co.	A
Saratoga Sentinel	Saratoga Co.	
St. Lawrence Republican	Ogdensburg, St. Lawrence Co.	A
Steuben Farmers' Advocate	Steuben Co.	
Seneca Falls Democrat	Seneca Falls, Seneca Co.	
Suffolk Republican Watchman	Suffolk Co.	
Ithaca Journal	Ithaca, Tompkins Co.	
Ulster American	Kingston, Ulster Co.	A
Wayne Sentinel	Wayne Co.	A
Westchester Reporter	Westchester Co.	
Wyoming Republican	Wyoming Co.	
Penn Yan Democrat	Penn Yan, Yates Co.	

II. HUNKER PAPERS

D—Declared for "new men," for state ticket in 1847.

E—Attacked Wright as a candidate, 1846.

F—Retracted attacks, and declared for Wright's renomination, 1846.

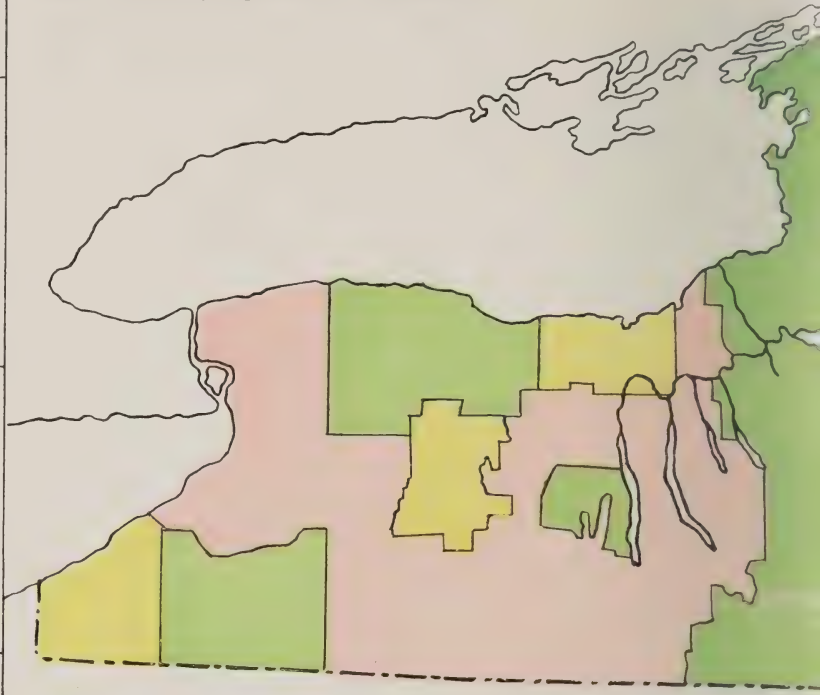
<i>Name of Paper</i>	<i>Where published</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Albany Argus	Albany, Albany Co.	D
Binghamton Democrat	Binghamton, Broome Co.	D
Cattaraugus Republican	Cattaraugus Co.	D
Chemung Democrat	Elmira, Chemung Co.	D
Norwich Journal	Norwich, Chenango Co.	D, E
Cortland Democrat	Cortland, Cortland Co.	D
Buffalo Courier	Buffalo, Erie Co.	D
Genesee Democrat	Genesee Co.	D
Batavia Times (Spirit of the Times)	Batavia, Genesee Co.	D, E
Catskill Democrat	Catskill, Greene Co.	D
Herkimer Democrat	Herkimer, Herkimer Co.	D
Black River Journal	Black River, Jefferson Co.	
Watertown Jeffersonian	Watertown, Jefferson Co.	
Brooklyn Eagle	Brooklyn, Kings Co.	D

Lewis Co. Republican	Lowville, Lewis Co.	D
Dansville Chronicle	Dansville, Livingston Co.	D
Madison Democrat	Madison Co.	D
Madison Observer	Madison Co.	D
Rochester Advertiser	Rochester, Monroe Co.	D
Montgomery Democrat	Fonda, Montgomery Co.	
New York Globe	New York, New York Co.	D, E, F
Niagara Democrat	Lockport, Niagara Co.	D
Rome Sentinel	Rome, Oneida Co.	D
Utica Observer	Utica, Oneida Co.	D, E
Onondaga Democrat	Syracuse, Onondaga Co.	D
Geneva Gazette	Geneva, Ontario Co.	D, E
Goshen Independent Republican	Goshen, Orange Co.	D
Newburgh Highland Courier	Newburgh, Orange Co.	D
Orleans Republican	Albion, Orleans Co.	D*
Freeman's Journal	Cooperstown, Otsego Co.	D*
Long Island Democrat	Jamaica, Queens Co.	
Saratoga Republican	Saratoga Co.	D
Schoharie Republican	Schoharie Co.	D
Seneca Observer	Seneca Co.	D
Suffolk Democrat	Huntington, Suffolk Co.	D
Republican Watchman	Monticello, Sullivan Co.	D
Ulster Democrat	Ulster Co.	D, E
Ulster Telegraph	Ulster Co.	D
Sandy Hill Herald	Sandy Hill, Washington Co.	D
Western Argus	Lyons, Wayne Co.	D
Westchester Spy	Westchester Co.	D
Westchester Herald	Mt. Pleasant, Westchester Co.	D
Perry Democrat	Perry, Wyoming Co.	D, E

* Afterwards changed to Barnburner side.

APPENDIX III.

Vote in Democratic state convention, Syracuse, Sept. 29-Oct. 2, 1847.—From official report published in *Argus*, Oct. 15, 1847; corroborated by *Atlas*, Sept. 30. Where adjoining counties voted alike, boundary separations not shown.

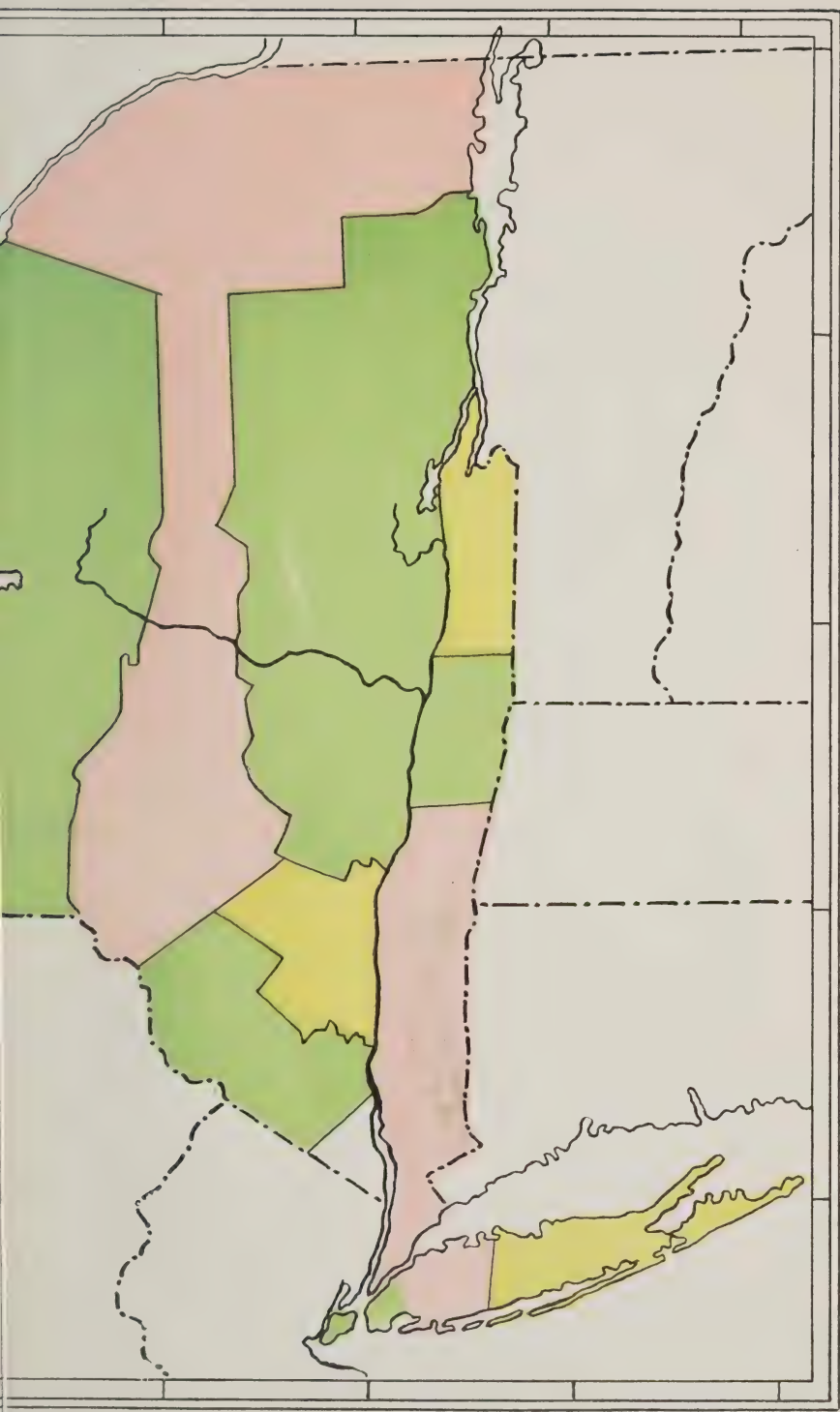


Barnburner counties, viz.: Allegany, Cayuga, Chemung, Clinton, Columbia, Delaware, Dutchess, Erie, Franklin, Herkimer, Lewis, New York, Niagara, Ontario, Otsego, Putnam, Queens, St. Lawrence, Seneca, Steuben, Tompkins, Westchester, Wyoming.
—57 votes

Hunker counties —67 votes

Counties evenly divided — 6 votes for each side

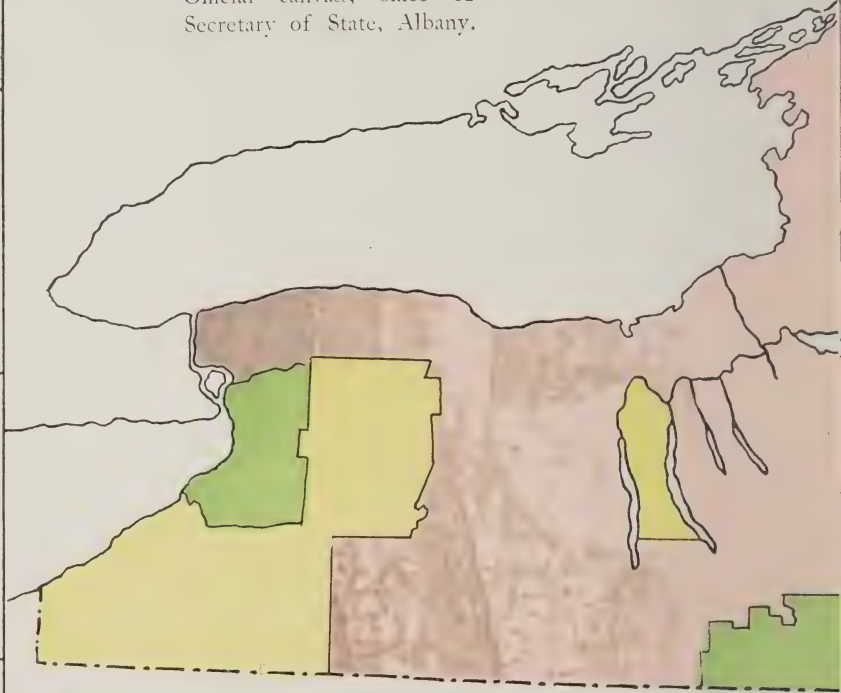
Uncolored—Rockland Co. unrepresented.



APPENDIX IV.

Localization of Barnburner strength, 1848, shown on vote for
Dix, Barnburner, vs. Walworth, Hunker, for Governor.

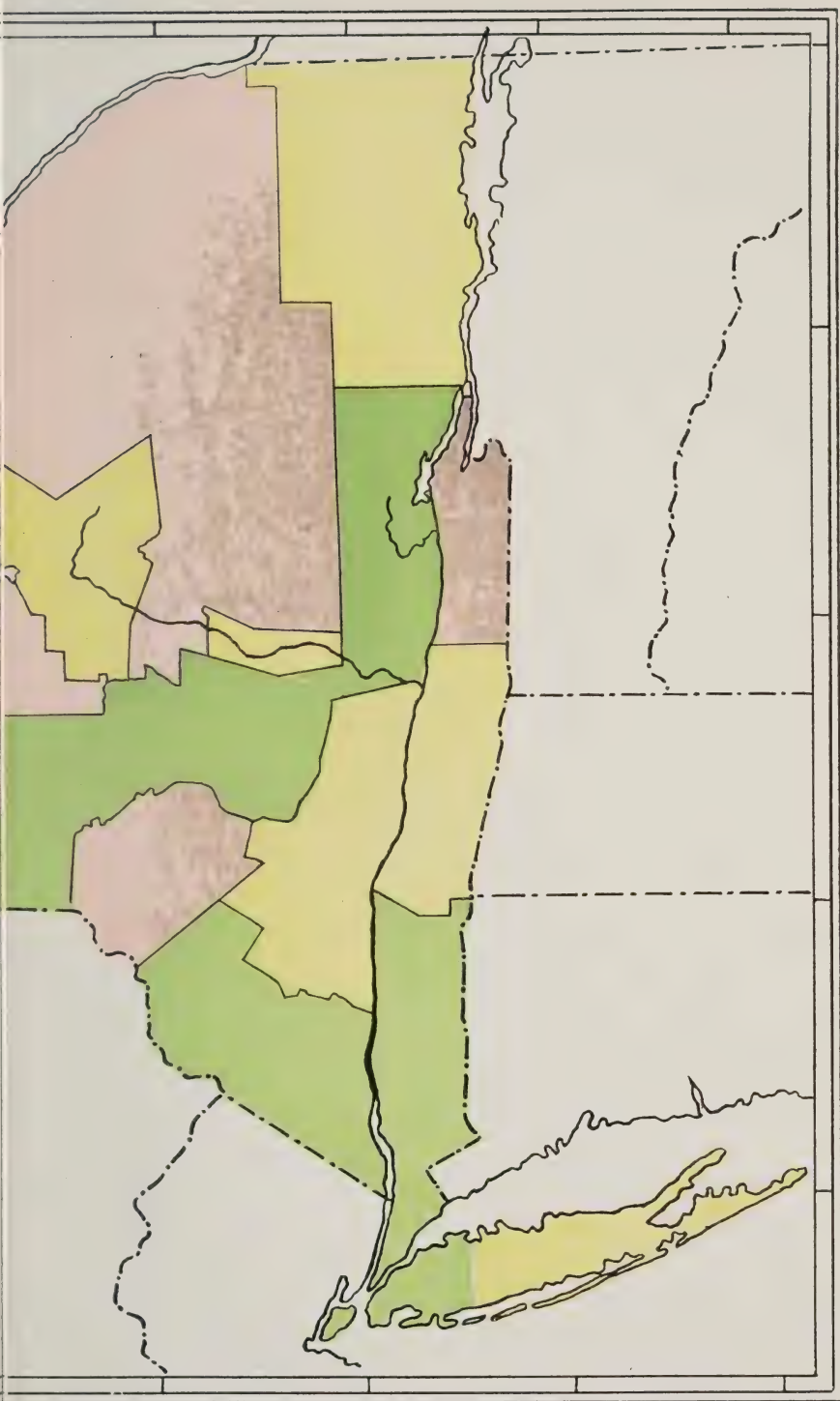
Official canvass, office of
Secretary of State, Albany.



Counties predominantly Barnburner, i.e., giving Dix more than 60% of vote cast for Dix & Walworth combined, viz.: Allegany, Cayuga, Chemung, Cortland, Delaware, Fulton and Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Livingston, Madison, Monroe, Niagara, Onondaga, Ontario, Orleans, Oswego, St. Lawrence, Steuben, Tompkins, Washington, Wayne, Yates.

Counties predominantly Hunker, less than 40% for Dix

Counties quite evenly divided, 40-60% for Dix.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. SOURCES

A. UNPUBLISHED

In the various collections of manuscript left by prominent public men of the period studied, there is much material that throws light upon the Barnburner movement. The causes that led to the party division and the motives that led to the choice of sides in it, are often illustrated in the correspondence of the leading actors with each other and with their followers. The following collections represent this class of material, on which I have drawn freely to amplify and vivify my narrative, as well as to corroborate or correct statements and opinions found in previous printed accounts:

1. VAN BUREN Mss., Library of Congress.

Contain many letters written to Martin Van Buren by leaders of the Barnburner movement during the time it was forming and at its height. Also, drafts of some by Van Buren in reply, showing the gradual evolution of his interest in the cause.

2. MARCY Mss., Library of Congress.

Contain some interesting letters written by and to Marcy during this period, chiefly while he was in Washington as secretary of war, when he was supposed to be exerting his influence against the Barnburners.

3. FLAGG Mss., New York Public Library; subdivided into

(a) SILAS WRIGHT LETTERS.

A collection of letters written to Flagg by Wright during a period of about twenty years; frank and confidential in tone, but freely discussing public questions. There is a noteworthy hiatus during the two years of Wright's gubernatorial term.

(b) MICHAEL HOFFMAN LETTERS.

A similar collection written by Hoffman, revealing the latter's unsparing hostility to the "interests" and "big business" of that day, as he saw it. Shows the most radical side of the Radical movement.

(c) MISCELLANEOUS LETTERS, 1824-1836.

A collection of letters of Flagg and his correspondents, other than the two foregoing. Illustrates the development of the Radical movement.

4. TILDEN Mss., N. Y. Public Library.

Contain what is left of Samuel J. Tilden's correspondence and papers, after his literary executor, John Bigelow, had destroyed what he considered of no permanent value. Unfortunately, this included most of Tilden's earlier correspondence, so the present collection has proved of little value on our topic.

5. O'REILLY Mss., chiefly in the N. Y. Historical Society, but a few pieces in the Rochester Historical Society.
An unclassified collection of writings by and to Henry O'Reilly, who was prominent during that period as a journalist and publicist, and occasionally active in politics. He had a large correspondence, which has furnished some points to the narrative of the period of the constitutional convention.
6. GEORGE P. BARKER Mss.
7. GEORGE W. CLINTON Mss.
8. THEODOTUS BURWELL: *Reminiscences*, in manuscript, dated "New York, Jan. 23, 1867."
These three are in the Buffalo Historical Society. They have yielded a few hints as to, e. g., Van Buren's influence in Buffalo.
9. OBITUARY RECORDS OF BUFFALO, 1812-1895; 4 volumes, Mss.; Farnham, Comp.
10. SYLVESTER J. MATTHEWS: *Reminiscences of Early Buffalo*.
These are also in the Buffalo Historical Society, and helped to contribute to the "local color" of the narrative.
11. GEORGE W. SMITH Mss., in private ownership, Watertown, N. Y.
Judge Smith was just beginning his public life at the time of the Barnburner revolt, and then and afterwards was intimately acquainted with many of the leaders in it, as well as with their opponents. He wrote a great deal for his own and other newspapers, but besides his published work, he left a mass of carefully prepared material, which he had several times proposed to convert into an historical and biographical volume on central New York, but he failed to complete his project. From this material, I derived much information on political and personal topics.
12. ABIJAH BECKWITH: *Reminiscences*; in the Smith collection.
A brief but straightforward account of the connection of a typical Barnburner—not a prominent leader—with the Free-Soil movement.
13. JOHN STRYKER Mss.
Stryker was an extremely active politician of that period, an associate and, according to George W. Smith's statement, a free correspondent of Croswell, Marcy, and others. These letters, if still in existence, should give many valuable hints about the political manoeuvres of that period; but, as yet, my efforts in Utica, Clinton, and Rome have not been able to trace them.
14. GOUVERNEUR KEMBLE Mss.
A few letters by and to Hon. Gouverneur Kemble, who served one term in congress, and who was an influential and respected leader in Putnam and Rockland counties. A moderate Barnburner.

In addition to the manuscript sources, there are still a few living sources, i. e., men surviving, though in very advanced years, from the Barnburner days, and having an intelligent knowledge of the subject. One such was Hon. C. D. Adams of Utica, very clear-minded in spite of his ninety years, who courteously gave me some interesting anecdotes of the northern New York Barnburners and their transference to the Republican party.

B. PUBLISHED

The published sources may be classified into, first, official publications, such as laws and reports produced in connection with the movement; second, platforms of the various political parties concerned; third, writings of the various participants and other public men of that period; fourth, newspaper files.

1. OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS.

(a) LAWS OF NEW YORK; by sessions of the legislature, annual.

Contain the text of the various statutes enacted by the legislature during the Radical-Barnburner era.

(b) JOURNALS OF THE SENATE, AND OF THE ASSEMBLY; annual.

Contain record of the votes cast on the various bills at issue.

(c) DOCUMENTS OF THE SENATE, AND OF THE ASSEMBLY; several volumes annually.

Contain:

(1) GOVERNORS' MESSAGES. Useful for presenting succinct accounts of the condition of the state in reference to finance, public works, etc., at successive stages of the controversy. Especially valuable are the messages of Governors Marcy, Bouck, and Wright, found in volumes named from the years of their incumbency.

(2) COMPTROLLERS' REPORTS. Similar in utility to the preceding, but more limited and detailed. Especially valuable are Flag's reports.

(3) REPORTS of other officials and boards, e. g., the Canal Commission (expenditures), the Secretary of State (official vote).

(4) REPORTS of important committees, e. g., of Committee on Canals (Deniston Report), Assembly document 177, 1844.

2. PLATFORMS.

(a) RESOLUTIONS of the Herkimer Mass-Convention, 1847.

(b) RESOLUTIONS of the Utica Convention, Feb., 1848.

(c) RESOLUTIONS of the Buffalo Convention, Aug., 1848.

These are all given in Gardiner's *The Great Issue*. These and similar platforms were frequently put out as campaign documents, and may be found also in collections of pamphlets, e. g., the Free-Soil pamphlets.

(d) PROCEEDINGS of the Rome Conventions, Sept., 1849. A. J. Rowley & Co., pub., Rome, N. Y., 1849.

3. WRITINGS OF PARTICIPANTS AND CONTEMPORARIES.

These are subject to the usual qualifications of ability, self-interest, and motive in writing. Material of some value has been found in each of the following:

(a) SAMUEL J. TILDEN: Public Writings and Speeches, ed. John Bigelow, N. Y., 1885.

Valuable for a narration of the course of Tilden and the Van Burens in the campaign of 1848. With this exception, Tilden has little to say of his activities as a Barnburner.

(b) HORATIO SEYMOUR: Collected Works.

Useful as giving the moderate Hunker position.

(c) WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT: Orations and Addresses; N. Y., 1873.

Not much of direct political bearing.

(d) HENRY B. STANTON: Random Recollections; N. Y., 1886.

Gives vivid accounts of the personality of the early leaders, and picturesque anecdotes of them.

(e) DANIEL S. DICKINSON: Life and Works; N. Y., 1867.

Of some value for the late period of the movement.

(f) JAMES K. POLK: Diary, 1845-49; Chicago Hist. Society collection, Chicago, 1910.

Valuable as showing the opinion of the Barnburner "revolt" held in other states and at Washington.

(g) THURLOW WEED: Autobiography, with Memoir; Boston, 1883-84.

Gives the Whig view of the Barnburners, with shrewd political observations.

(h) OTHERS, as Horace Greeley's *Recollections of a Busy Life*, have yielded only occasional hints.

4. NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS.

The period 1830-1850 was a time of vigorous newspaper polemics, in which the editorial page played a larger part than in more recent times, and the country weeklies both molded and reflected the political views of their communities. I have used all available papers of that period, in New York Public Library, New York State Library, and in the towns of their publication, as far as named below. I have, in every case where the question was one of fact, endeavored to check the statement by other publications or sources, and have based no conclusions on newspaper statements alone. Valuable are:

(a) ALBANY DAILY ARGUS.

(b) ALBANY DAILY ATLAS.

These two are to be corrected by each other. Their respective attitudes, against and for the Barnburners, have previously been explained.

(c) ROUGH HEWER, Albany, 1840-41.

Advocated Radical ideas before the split came.

(d) NEW YORK EVENING POST.

Bryant's paper. Dubbed by the *Argus* in 1847 "The organ of the secret circular."

(e) GLOBE, Washington, D. C.

For years the official Democratic paper at the National Capital. Distrusted by the Barnburners.

(f) GLOBE, New York.

Condemned by Polk as rabidly anti-Administration.

(g) BUFFALO DAILY COURIER.

(h) BUFFALO DAILY REPUBLIC.

These two corresponded, in Buffalo, to the *Argus* and the *Atlas* at the Capital.

(i) ALBANY EVENING JOURNAL.

Thurlow Weed's organ. Presents an outside view.

(j) NILES' REGISTER, Baltimore, Md.; especially vol. lxxiv.

Valuable for outside account of the national (Baltimore) convention of 1848.

(k) Individual copies of many local papers, notably the *Batavia Spirit of the Times*, *Orleans Republican*, *Rome Sentinel*, and *Jefferson Co. Democrat*.

These and many others referred to in the text, I examined in their place of publication or in the library collections.

Among periodicals, I have found some material, chiefly discussion of local currents, in

(a) DEMOCRATIC REVIEW; (Washington and New York); vols. 19, 23-25, 27.

(b) AMERICAN WHIG REVIEW; vol. 8.

(c) HUNT'S MERCHANTS' MAGAZINE, vols. 23-25.

II. SECONDARY WORKS

There has been little published that relates to this subject, especially. Most books treat the Barnburners as a faction whose chief aim was to promote the interests of Martin Van Buren, and have almost nothing to say about their activities prior to 1848. The works may be classified as, first, political histories; second, other special histories; third, general histories; fourth, biographies; fifth, miscellaneous.

A. POLITICAL HISTORIES

1. JABEZ D. HAMMOND: *Political History of New York*; Syracuse, 1852.

The most useful single work on the subject. By a moderate Barnburner, but reasonably free from bias. It stops, however, with the election of 1846. Very valuable for accounts of legislative caucuses, chief proceedings of the legislature, etc.

2. DE ALVA S. ALEXANDER: *A Political History of the State of New York*; New York, 1906.

A modern work, containing one chapter on "The Barnburners and the Hunkers," besides numerous references in other chapters.

3. JOHN S. JENKINS: History of Political Parties in the State of New York, 1789-1849; Auburn, 1849.
By a professional writer, not so favorably thought of by his contemporaries as Hammond was, and lacking Hammond's access to important sources.
4. F. BYRDSALL: History of the Locofocos; New York, 1842.
Throws light on the general condition of state politics, then.
5. EDWARD STANWOOD: A History of the Presidency, Boston, 1898;
also,
6. Presidential Elections; revised edition, Boston, 1912.
Sum up the general information on campaigns.
7. JESSE MACY: History of Political Parties, 1846-1861; New York, 1900.
Gives occasional hints.
8. RANSOM H. GILLET: Democracy in the United States; New York, 1868.
Written by a staunch Democrat of that period, with a justifying motive; to be used cautiously.
9. JAMES K. MCGUIRE, editor: Democratic Party of the State of New York; 3 vols.; New York, 1905.
Contains a great deal of information, but largely of a tone favorable to party loyalty and "regularity"; apt to construe Barnburners' actions uniformly in an unfavorable light.
10. FRANCIS CURTIS: The Republican Party, 1854-1904; New York, 1904.
11. GEORGE O. SEILHAMER, compiler: Leslie's History of the Republican Party; New York, 1898.
These refer to that element of the Barnburners who became Republicans. Curtis' book preferably, as Seilhamer's is a "subscription book," of little original value.

B. OTHER SPECIAL HISTORIES

1. CHARLES Z. LINCOLN: Constitutional History of New York; Rochester, 1906.
Useful in connection with the Barnburners' plans of constitutional reform, culminating in the convention of 1846.
2. NOBLE E. WHITFORD: History of the Canal System of New York; supplement to the Report of the State Engineer, for 1905.
Useful in tracing the development of the canals, which the Radicals made a political issue.
3. A. BARTON HEPBURN: Artificial Waterways of the World.
Emphasizes New York canals.

4. COUNTY HISTORIES.

Of limited usefulness, but containing accounts—usually too laudatory—of individual leaders. I have derived some local information from the following:

(a) F. B. HOUGH: History of Jefferson Co.; Albany, 1854.

(b) N. S. BENTON: Herkimer County and the Upper Mohawk Valley; Albany, 1856.

(c) GEORGE R. HOWELL, ed.: History of Albany Co.; N. Y., 1886.

5. PROCEEDINGS AND RECORDS OF HISTORICAL SOCIETIES.

Most of the county historical societies are in a comatose condition, and such activity as they do display is along antiquarian, rather than political, lines. I have found two notable exceptions, from which I have derived valuable help, as follows:

(a) PUBLICATIONS OF THE BUFFALO HISTORICAL SOCIETY, and

(b) PAPERS READ BEFORE THE HERKIMER CO. HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

These contain addresses and descriptions by men who had personal knowledge of those times.

C. GENERAL HISTORIES

These are of little help in our topic. Allusions are found in

1. HARPER's (publ.) Encyclopedia of United States History; New York, 1902.
2. HERMANN VON HOLST: Constitutional and Political History of the United States, vol. III; Chicago, 1881.
3. JAMES SCHOULER: History of the United States under the Constitution, vol. IV; New York, 1889.
4. GEORGE P. GARRISON: Westward Expansion, 1841-50; in American Nation series, vol. XVII; New York 1906.

D. BIOGRAPHIES

1. NATIONAL CYCLOPEDIA OF AMERICAN BIOGRAPHY.

While not a scholarly work, this contains some references to minor leaders that are not otherwise so easily available.

2. EDWARD M. SHEPARD: Martin Van Buren; Boston, 1888.

Attributes Van Buren's course to worthy and statesmanlike motives.

3. WILLIAM ALLEN BUTLER: Martin Van Buren; Lawyer, Statesman, and Man; New York, 1862.

On the whole favorable to the Barnburner leader, but not blindly.

4. J. S. JENKINS: Life of Silas Wright; Auburn, 1847.

5. J. D. HAMMOND: Life of Silas Wright; Syracuse, 1852.

6. R. H. GILLET: *Life and Times of Silas Wright*; Albany, 1874.
Of the three, Hammond is the most valuable, for the same reasons that apply to his *History*. Gillet, however, gives many speeches, etc.
7. H. G. PEARSON: *James S. Wadsworth of Genesee*; New York, 1913.
Written from scant material.
8. A. C. McLAUGHLIN: *Lewis Cass*; Boston, 1891.
Unfavorable to the Barnburners.
9. CARL SCHURZ: *Henry Clay*; 2 vols.; in American Statesmen series.
Unfriendly.
10. Other biographies of men of that time, e. g., *Millard Fillmore, Biography of*; Buffalo, 1856, have nothing of particular value.

E. PAMPHLETS AND MISCELLANEOUS

1. O. C. GARDINER: *The Great Issue*; New York, 1848.
Of great value, though a campaign document; see above, I, B, 2.
2. GEORGE R. DAVIS: *Speech on the financial policy of the Democratic and Whig Parties*; in the Assembly, Feb. 9-11, 1843.
Reprinted by the *Argus* and *Troy Budget*. Useful on the first dividing issue.
3. THOMAS SMITH: *Political Parties and Places of Meeting*; New York Historical Society, 1893.
Contains slight allusions.
4. *Civil List, State of New York*; Albany, 1886.
Referred to for lists of officers, etc.

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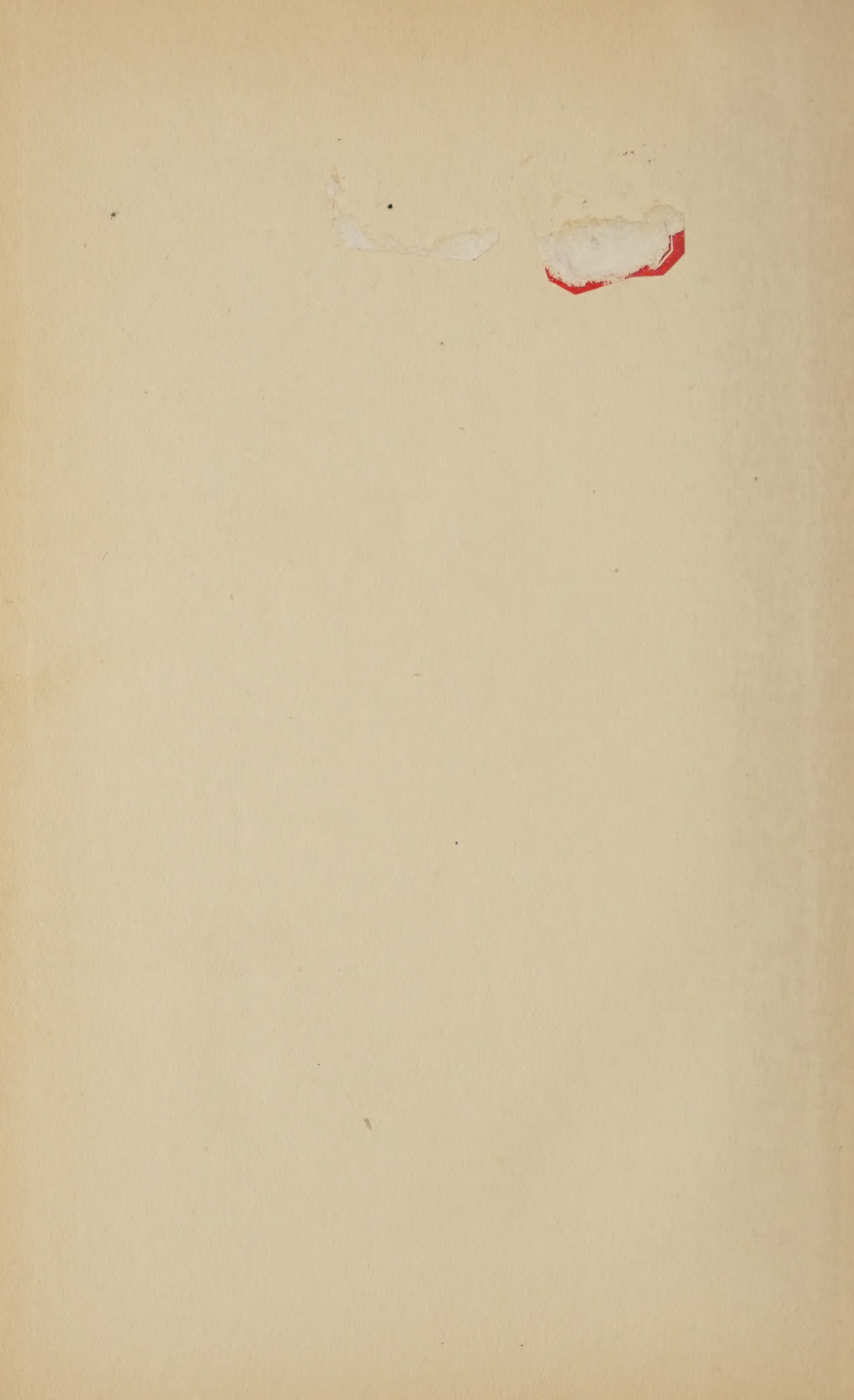
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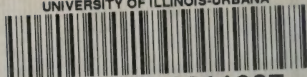
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